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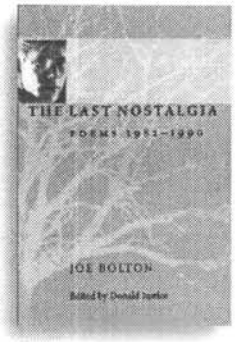


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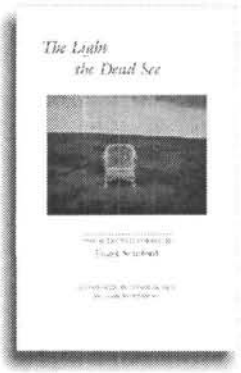


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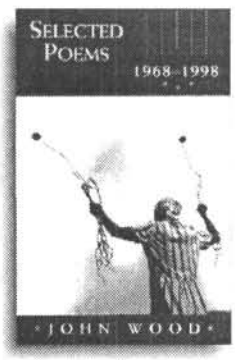


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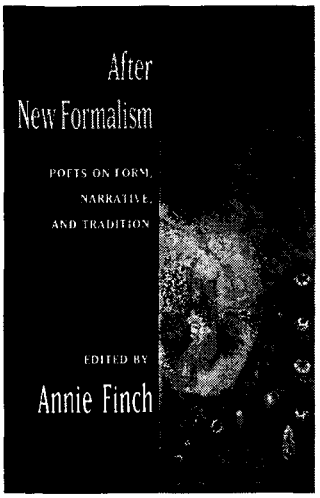


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# The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

VOLUME LII NUMBER 2 SUMMER 1999

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## TO OUR READERS

A new book by an Advisory Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW has just been published. In accordance with our policy, it will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

**HAYDEN CARRUTH:** *Beside the Shadblow Tree: A Memoir of James Laughlin.* Copper Canyon Press. $14.00 paperback.

Publication costs of this issue have been supported by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency.

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# Travel Note:

# Cannibals and Kava

Fiji, 1987

IN DECEMBER 1987, MY TWENTY-YEAR-OLD SON JOHNNY AND I were in a boat approaching an island off an island off Fiji. You would perhaps imagine a smallish tropical island with long, sandy beaches, a peaceful bright blue lagoon surrounded by white coral reefs against which the Pacific surf was breaking. You would be right. There was even the wreck of an old steamer poised picturesquely at an angle on one of the coral reefs. You may, if you have read the tourist brochures, also imagine a rather luxurious hotel nestled amongst the palm trees, with discreetly-placed cabins for its guests, a large pool and a smiling, attentive Fijian staff. You would be wrong. As we rounded a promontory, our host in the boat proudly pointed out where we would live—a tin-roofed shack, with corrugated iron sheeting roughly tacked onto the sides, of the kind that was familiar from the TV films of slums outside Rio or Johannesburg. We looked at each other, expressionless—this was not going to be what we had expected.

Not, I may say, that we had expected the luxury hotel, nor had we wanted it. We knew we were going to stay in a real Fijian village. Our guidebook had remarked: "If you are lucky enough to be invited to a Fijian village . . . " And we had been, by a Fijian man called Benny on the ferryboat we had taken to the first island. Most of the people had been seasick on the boat, and so had a cow. A seasick cow is a very sad sight. We had also done the other things that the guidebook had told us to do if so invited: we were both wearing the sarongs, or *sulus*, worn by Fijian men and women, and we were carrying our *sevusevu* or gift to the headman of the village. We had wanted to be generous in our gifts and not take advantage of the hospitality of the Fijians. Benny had helped us choose them; we had quantities of rice, sugar, cigarettes and other goods, plus also some Fijian tobacco or "Fiji smoke," as Benny called it, which he said would make a good present for his mother, who lived with him.

The Fijian villages we had passed in the bus we had taken across the main island of Fiji to the ferry had all looked clean and well-kept, with attractive thatch-roofed huts. So we were not at all prepared for Benny's village. It was mostly a collection of dilapidated tin huts surrounded by swampy ground, of which Benny's was possibly the poorest. A villager on the first island had laughed when we told him where we were going. He had also informed us that "the mosquito is the spirit of that island." This

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also was true. However, there we were, committed for several days, because the island possessed no boat of its own and we had had to arrange to be collected by the boat belonging to a village on another island.

We made our way to Benny's hut. His mother, along with a great many islanders and children, was standing outside to greet us, and we presented our *sevusevu* of "Fiji's smoke" to her, which she eagerly unwrapped. She was carrying a thick stick by her side, which she kept glowing at the end by thrusting it into a fire. It functioned rather in the manner of a car cigarette-lighter and indeed she was soon lighting up. It didn't take us long to realize that what we had innocently given her was in fact pot and indeed, thanks to our present, Ma remained totally stoned throughout our stay.

We were then shown into the hut. This was simply one smallish room with an earth floor, a few dirty rush mats thrown over it and chickens running in and out. There was a small raised box on one side, covered with another dirty rush mat, that served as a single bed, a rag curtain half across it; in one corner were a couple of pots and a spoon or two. There were flies everywhere, as well as tiny mosquitoes—the spirit of the island. The Headman of the village, said Benny, was expecting us up on the hill, where we would have *yanggona*. *Yanggona*, we knew from our guidebook, is the Fijian drink, often also called *kava*: it formed an important part of our *sevusevu*.

Up on the hill we were presented to the *turanga*, the Headman, Seta, accompanied by two or three of the chief men of the village. They were of course dressed in *sulus* and were sitting on rush mats on the floor of another decaying hut, but this was one was grander than Benny's, for it was made of stone. Benny offered our *sevusevu*, which appeared to be graciously received by Seta, and we were told to be seated. We did so, negotiating our *sulus* with difficulty and being careful to keep our naked feet from pointing at other people, which Benny had told us was bad manners. Then the *yanggona* ceremony began.

The kava roots were pounded in a wooden bowl till they were powdery. The powder was then put in a bowl carved like a turtle and the man making the drink emptied a plastic bucket of water into it. He then took a long length of the roots and used them in the bowl like a strainer, shaking it out of the door with a flicking movement till the liquid had no bits in it. The kava-maker then said a short phrase in Fijian and clapped his hands three times. The kava-server came forward, dipped half a coconut in the bowl and presented it to each person in turn, in strict order of precedence. The Headman was of course first and Johnny was second, as guest of honor (I of course was a woman and only there because of Johnny—women were not usually included in the *yanggona* ceremony). Before each person drank, the drinker clapped his hands once, then drained the bowl at a gulp; afterwards everyone clapped three times and shouted *Matha!* The communal kava coconut went round again—and again—and again. The liquid looked and tasted like

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dirty sock water, but we had read that in fact it was some kind of drug—a tranquilizer, it was said. It was of course impossible to refuse, and what effect it would have on us we had no idea.

One effect to start with was that the talk got livelier. Seta spoke a little English, as did one or two of his men; Benny spoke English rather well; the rest of the men only spoke Fijian. They of course asked us questions about our country. We had said we were "from Finland," which was strictly true, as that was the country in which we lived. I had often found it useful if I did not know how the fact I was British would be received. No one has anything against Finns. This time it was to rescue us from great problems. We told them about Finland, a country of which they understandably knew nothing. I was carrying some postcards of Helsinki, one of which showed it in the winter snow, with fishing boats in the harbor, surrounded by thick ice. They passed this round and each gazed at it in wonder for twenty minutes at a time. I wondered what on earth they made of it, for probably some or all of them had never seen ice or snow. Meanwhile, my nextdoor neighbor on the floor, who spoke some English, explained to me cheerfully that Fijians used to be cannibals and that his grandfather had been one. I had read, in fact, that the last missionary had been eaten in 1887. This was 1987—I hoped they didn't intend to celebrate the centenary.

Meanwhile, the *yanggona* ceremony went on. At some point "the boys" were brought in to entertain us, three boys in their teens with guitars, who sang melodious songs whose main lyrics always seemed to be "Bula . . . bula . . . bula. . . . " Five hours had gone by, hours of sitting with outstretched legs on the floor, hours of the coconut cup. It became obvious that the effect of kava on Seta and several others was far from that of a tranquilizer, as they were getting very drunk indeed, although oddly enough neither Johnny nor I seemed to be feeling any different. Afterwards, we wondered if the effects of kava were cumulative. At this point, Benny suggested that we might eat and hope rose in us. However, hope was quickly destroyed. "It is I who decide here!" shouted Seta. Then he pointed a finger at me. "*She* stays in my hut tonight!"

I still think that this was one of the worst moments of my life. I had no idea what Seta's motives might be—for all I knew it might be a great compliment, but it was certainly a compliment I had no wish to accept. At the same time, Seta was the all-powerful head of a village from which there was at present no escape. It was Finland that came to our rescue. We explained (through Benny as our interpreter) that in "our country" our customs and religion made it impossible for a son to allow his widowed mother to sleep without him in the room as her protector. This was of course a complete fabrication, but we counted on their knowing absolutely nothing about Finland and its customs. It worked. I was rather angrily dismissed to eat with the women; Johnny, however, was forced to stay.

The women's meal consisted of the bones of a chicken floating in

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water—the men were later to get the meat. A large number of children gathered round to watch us, amongst whom was a little girl of about five, who screamed with terror when she saw me and had to be carried away. After the meal, the children were given the chicken bones to suck—the killing of a chicken was clearly a feast-day event. Then it was time for bed, for me at any rate, and mercifully in Benny's hut not Seta's. The night was starry as we walked down the hill; sounds of "bula . . . bula . . . " could be heard coming from the hut up above, and I knew the *yanggona* ceremony was still going on.

I was escorted to bed by about twelve women and girls, who stood around waiting to see what I would do. There was nowhere to wash and no water. With such an interested audience, I decided that Finnish women slept in their day clothes at night and I lay down on the bed. I had been assigned the bed-of-honor—indeed the only bed—which was covered with a rush mat and a very old, dirty pillow. I imagined it must really be Ma's bed, and indeed the pillow smelt strongly of pot. I pulled the mosquito net around me, though I was not optimistic about its efficiency as it was covered with holes. One by one the women filed out—"Goodnight, Diana"—all except for one little girl, who remained to keep me company. I remained sleepless, listening to the faint sounds of guitars and "Bula . . . bula . . . " in the distance and wondered anxiously how Johnny was getting on.

Johnny was not getting on very well. As Seta, the Headman, became more affected by the drink, he became more aggressive. Up to now Johnny had been permitted to drink half a coconut shell of the disgusting liquid as against the Headman's whole one; but now Seta said accusingly "We are not equal" and insisted that Johnny keep pace with him with a whole shell each time. Johnny, not wanting to antagonize him further, did so. "Ah!" said the men as he drank shell after shell, still fairly unaffected by the drink, "You are a lion!" But this was not enough for Seta. He decided that the gifts we had brought, our *sevusevu*, had not been enough. Johnny must make an apology in front of all the men and promise that he would give a bigger and better *sevusevu* next day—of kava, cigarettes and "Fiji smoke." Curbing his anger, for he knew our original gift had been generous, Johnny made the apology, promised the *sevusevu*—and was allowed at last to leave and to return to Benny's hut and me. Finally we both fell asleep, Johnny on the floor, along with Benny, his Ma, his daughter—and of course several chickens.

We were awakened by the crowing of roosters and the rattle of pans as Ma prepared breakfast on the small wooden fire in a tin shelter just outside the hut. Ma had a cigar shape of "Fiji smoke" in her mouth as she did so. We sat down on the worn and chicken-stained rush mat. The flies buzzed around our heads and bare arms, and the tiny mosquitoes were still everywhere. Ma had a small bowl of grey water, saved from washing the dishes, into which she dipped a filthy rag. We wiped our hands on the rag and passed it on to the next person, closing our minds firmly to thoughts of hygiene. Breakfast was a bowl of rice and another

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of lemon tea. The rice was sprinkled with tiny black spots. Some herb, perhaps? Closer inspection revealed that these were small beetles—weevils. We tried to pick out a few, but it was impossible—there was about one weevil to three grains of rice. Again we closed our minds: "Protein," we told ourselves firmly as we swallowed the mixture. A modern restaurant menu would have said that the weevils imparted a pleasant crunchy texture to the rice. The lemon tea was liberally sprinkled with drowned fruit flies, and there was nothing to be done about that either but drink it and them. After breakfast, Benny collected our dollars to buy the extra *sevusevu* for the chief and told us happily that a kava-drinking session was planned for the afternoon and the whole of the night—together, of course, with Seta and company. Silently, we contemplated this unpleasant prospect.

We had of course by now realized that we had possibly done something very foolish. Seta ruled over his village as he might have done 800 years ago and we were in fact in his power as long as we remained on the island. As far as we could discover, the only tourists who had been there before were a Swiss couple three years ago, who had had their own tent and camped some way away from the village. Nobody of course knew where we were, as we had not thought to tell anyone where we were going, and, since the island owned no seagoing boat, we were stuck there until the one belonging to the neighboring island came back to fetch us—if it did. It would be possible for us to disappear without trace.

Meanwhile, we looked out at the clear, tropical blue waters of the lagoon and the long sandy beach round the island—the idyllic unspoilt setting of one's dreams. We had not up to now had any chance to wash (except for Ma's dirty rag). Could we perhaps, we asked Benny hopefully, go for a swim? Well, yes, said Benny, the islanders did go into the sea, but people did not take their clothes off or use a swimsuit. The idea of entering the water fully clothed and then the salt drying into our skin and clothes again did not appeal. The only other source of clean water was a small tap in the center of the village where the women washed their clothes. However, Benny said he had been on the main island and understood foreigners' ways more than the others. He could take us the next day to a place the other side of the island where we could swim in our swimsuits unobserved; meanwhile, we would go for a walk.

So we walked slowly along the beach amongst black rocks and boulders in animal and human shapes, bending to look at the exotic shells. Benny pointed out to us a huge fragment of baked terra cotta clay: "From one of our old cooking pots," he explained. But he had no need to tell us—its shape was recognizable from every cartoon we had ever seen of cannibals eating a missionary. There had of course been missionaries on these islands, too. Their influence was still strong and obvious, not least in the custom of only being permitted to swim fully-clothed; but Benny and his family also said grace and prayed before every meal, as did all the villagers. There was no church on the island:

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the nearest one was on the larger island farther away; on the Sunday we saw a crowd of churchgoers standing up shoulder to shoulder in a low, flat boat, being slowly paddled across the wide channel between the islands; the sound of hymn-singing drifted across the water.

On the walk, we asked Benny about the village. There were four clans, he said. The Headman's was a hereditary position, and he came from the ambassador or adviser clan. Benny also came from this clan (Seta was his eldest brother), but he was the younger brother of four and, we guessed, occupied a somewhat outcast position, since his hut was on the outskirts of the village and was one of the poorest. We wondered if this was because he had no wife and only a daughter. We gathered he had gained prestige by bringing us as tourists to the island, along with our *sevusevu*. Other clans were the soldier clan and the priest clan—we never discovered what the fourth was. The men tended the plantation, but since they rested in the afternoons and drank kava all night, their work did not seem much of a burden. It was, of course, the women who did most of the work. The women cooked, washed, collected seafood, carried wood for the fires. Occasionally the men had a "fish drive," at which the head of the soldier clan had the right to spear the biggest fish, but the everyday fishing was also done by the women. The women did not drink the kava and did not receive any of the presents from the *sevusevu*, nor were they allowed to walk on the beach. When the men ate, the women brushed the flies away from their faces with rags; when together, the men and women stayed on different sides of the room. Ma, as the mother of the chief, was the only woman allowed to be present at the kava ceremony, although she did not drink but simply smoked her pot.

Lunch was, as all the meals were to be, a variation on the theme of a broth made from an unknown substance, cassava (breadfruit—white, solid and tasteless), mangoes and rice, spiced of course with weevils and fruit flies. After lunch we were told everyone rested, so we lay down, hot, sticky, and sleepless in the hut with Benny, Ma, his daughter and the chickens; then once more we were led up to the kava-drinking hut and the whole ceremony was repeated. For some reason, however, we were released at ten o'clock in the evening—perhaps the chief found it more fun without us.

The next day was the day fixed for the boat to come and fetch us off the island. In the morning, Benny prayed before breakfast for the weather; I prayed that the boat would come. Benny took us as promised across the island, a long trek barefoot through muddy, swampy jungle where thick roots tripped us up and the large holes of land crabs were hard to avoid. But we swam. Free in the clear water we became almost hysterical with the relief of being able to talk to each other and to be unwatched for a short period. Up to now, this had never been possible. Custom clearly dictated that a guest could not be left alone. We were always attended to bed and then one or more children were left to watch us; even when we reluctantly had to use the only toilet on the island—a

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broken pedestal in the centre of the village surrounded on three sides by corrugated iron—even here a group of children would gather round to attend and watch us.

As we waded through the mud on the trail back to the village, the wind began to pick up. Benny looked at the sky doubtfully. The boat would not come if it was bad weather. However, he said, brightening, it would mean more time for us to drink kava with the chief. We anxiously watched the weather throughout our meal and the hours of rest after it.

We had found the stale air in the hut suffocating and had this time asked if we could rest on the beach. Benny reluctantly agreed—we had realized by this time that any request to be alone was probably impolite. As we lay there with eyes closed, children gradually crept around us: they brushed the flies away from us and fanned my face, then began to sing with natural harmony and grace. A boy beat time with a stick against another stick and a girl strummed a fan. They thought us sleeping and came closer, pointing out to each other the small brown spots on my arms and examining the soles of my feet. No doubt the were saying: "Look! They have bits that are normal, like us." I felt like Gulliver. Despite these charming children, I strained my ears to catch the noise of a motor. Finally, magically, I heard it in the distance. By this time the sky was darkening and rain threatened. There was no time, thank heaven, for farewell kava. We were hurried into the boat. Once on the sea, the waves grew choppy and we raced the rain as the light and the color of the sea grew darker. Five minutes before we reached our destination, there was a tropical downpour and we were soaked to the skin. We did not care—we had got away from the island.

Later, we discussed our experience. Why had this trip been such a nightmare? We knew that the Fijian villagers had treated us as guests. Although our backpacks contained undreamed of riches for them, such as cameras and watches, nothing was ever taken. All except the chief had been friendly and had done their best for us; the children had been particularly sweet. Of course it could have been a combination of kava and jet lag that made this stay seem like an imprisonment of months, not days; but it was more that the gulf between their world and ours was too great for us to bridge. We had to shut down half our brains to be able to cope and forget the dirt, the food, the flies. The days were endlessly spent in sitting or lying without doing anything to activate one's brain or body. Seven or eight hours of kava drinking each day was a penance of patience. Another penance was never to be alone. Added to the problem of total physical and mental inactivity, there was the frustration of having no power to make any decision. We who had in our vanity supposed that we could accustom ourselves to anything, were forced to revise our ideas. Travel, they say, broadens the mind; we found that it can also narrow it.

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THOMAS L. JEFFERS

# Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, and the End of Sex

A century ago, when the socialist tide was rising, writers like Friedrich Engels and Charlotte Perkins Gilman called for the state to abolish the family as a relic of the patriarchal age. Now, when the socialist tide is receding, arguments for or against their call have become moot: families are being abolished by the behavior of individuals. To speak only of America, one-third of all births occur outside of marriage (60 percent in black neighborhoods, 35 percent in white), and the children growing up in fatherless households have difficulty staying in school, staying out of jail, or, as Robert Bly in two popular books has convincingly argued, just understanding what it might mean to draw on the masculine and feminine energies within themselves, and to mature as male or female persons. College students can often cite these statistics, and they know, often firsthand, about the general crisis of the family. What, teaching a class on "family novels" last year, I was initially surprised to find they don't know *anything* about is D. H. Lawrence, whose writings may, by a stretch of the imagination, share some responsibility for the current crisis. Is he not a forerunner of the sexual revolution that my generation lived through in the sixties and that helped weaken the principles encouraging young men and women to marry and stay married? Is he not the author whose initials one of my sons, some years ago when he was learning about baseball, would notice on the spines of books in my study, and whom, unconsciously seizing upon a critical half-truth, he would call "Designated Hitter Lawrence"? Yet he is also the author whose work can, by a still further stretch of the imagination, reinvigorate those principles that stable family life is based on.

My first knowledge of Lawrence came in adolescence, when a cousin from Michigan, visiting us in Colorado with his family, pulled out a paperback of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—the ban on its

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printing had recently been lifted—and showed me the pages on which "fuck" and "cunt" were actually spelled out.[1] Wow. Those were also the years when, in my 2000-student suburban Denver high school, I knew of only one girl who got pregnant (she clearly had what nowadays is euphemistically called an eating disorder, and the father was rumored to be a man old enough to be *her* father), and when the typical wild action on a weekend, pursued by maybe a dozen Sal Mineo wannabes, consisted of drag racing under the influence of 3.2 beer. Now, as I've said, my students had heard neither of *Lady Chatterley* nor of the man who wrote it, and even the better suburban high schools they've gone to manifest forms of deviance that, however downwardly defined deviance may be, are alarming.

What I'm proposing here is frankly utopian. High school students are too young and often too subliterate, but college students and adults generally can, if they read at all, learn from Lawrence to value nothing less than heterosexual love, stable marriage, and the two-parent family. This educational project may seem to rest on a paradox, but wait and see. I focus primarily on a few representative moments in *Sons and Lovers*, not least because it's the best of Lawrence's novels for readers to start with. My title's reference to "the end of sex" is of course an equivoque: it's about the abolition of what Lawrence considered the bad sort of sexual thought and action, and a rearticulation of what the good sort is for.

After the publication of *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Lawrence the theorist began pursuing an idea adumbrated in the suppressed Foreword and fully tried out in the *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914), viz. that sexual "exploration"—a word he usually preferred to

[1] Lawrence's intent was hygienic: he wanted to cleanse the Anglo-Saxon words so that they might again be used in tender amatory speech. The mistake, as Anthony Burgess has lucidly said, lay in that "again." "Fuck" may be an old word, cognate with the German *ficken*, but it appears in no Anglo-Saxon document, has always been taboo, and signals an impersonal, aggressive act suitable for a brothel but not for a home. "Mellors does not fuck Connie," Burgess explains, "nor do he and she fuck a flame into being. They make love. This is not a euphemism. On the other hand, *fuck* is a genuine dysphemism. Joyce exploited it correctly in *Ulysses*, where it is an item in an explosion of obscenity and a carefully laid verbal climax. Molly Bloom refers to herself as being fucked by Blazes Boylan, but in a phase of resentment toward a husband who has ceased to make love to her." This verbal distinction is lost on Norman Mailer in *Prisoner of Sex*, his otherwise intelligent and spirited defense of Lawrence against Kate Millett's misrepresentations.

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"pleasure," which has a Benthamite, technological connotation and which he therefore regarded as trivially masturbatory or clitoral—was an end in itself, separate from any philoprogenitive consequences. Reproduction was a sort of accident; "the leap into the unknown" was of the essence. "It is so arranged," he writes in the *Study of Thomas Hardy*, "that the very act which carries us out into the unknown shall probably deposit seed for security to be left behind. But the act, called the sexual act, is not for the depositing of the seed." We may think of what he says elsewhere in the *Study*, that the poppy's glory is in its blooming; the windy scattering of seed is not its business. But remembering some of his "beast" poems, we may also think of sea turtles, which fertilize and deposit their eggs in the sand and shove off, leaving the little ones to hatch and, in a *sauve-qui-peut*, dash for the sea amid a swarm of hungry gulls. Despisers of the stuffy Victorian family like Samuel Butler wouldn't have minded such a picture—don't parents just get in the way and frustrate the child's inborn genius?—and, as Lawrence got more distance from his own mother and father, the more he at first liked it himself. Here's from "Tortoise Family Connections" (1921):

His mother deposited him on the soil as if he were no more
than droppings,
And now he scuffles tinily past her as if she were an old rusty
tin. . . .

It is no use my saying to him in an emotional voice:
"This is your Mother, she laid you when you were an egg."

He does not even trouble to answer: "Woman, what have I to
do with thee?"
He wearily looks the other way,
And she even more wearily looks another way still,
Each with the utmost apathy,
Incognisant,
Unaware,
Nothing. . . .

Does he look for a companion?

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No, no, don't think it.
He doesn't know he is alone;
Isolation is his birthright,
This atom.

This unsponsored isolation is evidently all right for reptiles and, in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers,* how splendidly Lawrence realizes, and identifies with, their otherness. Such identifications can however be only a species of serious play, a temporary secession from the race, for a writer who is primarily a novelist. In *Women in Love,* Birkin might in an hour of disgust fancy "a world empty of people, just uninterrupted grass, and a hare sitting up," but the novelist was not only stuck with people for his characters, he thought it just possible that, if he could make a few of them live *on* the page, they might help us to live *off* it. As Lawrence writes in "Why the Novel Matters": "To be alive, to be man alive, to be whole man alive: that is the point. And at its best, the novel, and the novel supremely, can help you. It can help you not to be [a] dead man in life. . . . Right and wrong is an instinct: but an instinct of the whole consciousness in a man, bodily, mental, spiritual at once. And only in the novel are *all* things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play, when we realize that life itself, and not inert safety, is the reason for living." A familiar Laurentian declaration. What is less frequently noted within this therapeutic aesthetic is Lawrence's comprehensive insistence on "*all* things"—body mind spirit, loins brain heart—that constitute "man alive" and "woman alive."

He was indeed the early modernist prophet of the "unseen hosts" of the body, who warned the intelligentsia against the dangers of "mental consciousness," which in turn made him, as I began by saying, one of the great seers of the sexual revolution of the sixties. He offered a collier's son's response to cultural etiolation. Believing indeed that the problems not only of fellow writers such as E. M. Forster or Bertrand Russell but of the majority of his European contemporaries could be solved by relying less on abstract intellectual and more on concrete physical apprehension of themselves and of the world, he spoke passionately about darkness and the phallic column filled with blood. It was the polemically necessary emphasis, first for the age of

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Georgian verse, then for that of Bloomsbury *belles-lettres*. What we need to recall, however, are the other parts of the polemic, which together with "body" make up what Lawrence understood to be fully living humanity. After the excesses of *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), with its celebrations of the "dark gods" of the Aztecs—a thought experiment that Anthony Burgess has suggestively likened to Swift's "Voyage to the Houyhnhnms" or Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—Lawrence tried to right the balance. Enough of kingmaking politics and savior-making religion. It was time to appeal to "mind" on behalf of "spirit." Accordingly, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) and "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley*" (1929), he muted his preachments about individuals maintaining a tortoise-like isolate integrity, or about sexual exploration leading to an impersonal epiphany without concern for reproduction, and openly praised both coition and conception, marriage and family. I want, briefly, to trace the outline of this late appeal, and then, by reference to *Sons and Lovers*, to show that he was in effect reviving concerns important to him from the beginning.

At the end of *Lady Chatterley*, Connie is not only pregnant, she's full of expectation. Having a child is not in her case an accident, it's a responsibility she greets with joy as well as fear and trembling. She is not thinking of an abortion, nor can we imagine her welcoming a miscarriage, as Ursula Brangwen does at the end of *The Rainbow* (1915). Connie's eagerness to bear a child indeed recalls that of Ursula's mother, Anna, in one of those scenes that sound risible *out* of context but that are mesmerizing *in*, where, pregnant with Ursula, she dances like David before the Lord. To follow Lawrence's distinction, sex is "procreative" (produces offspring) as well as "creative" (fulfills emotionally). In the eloquent defense of marriage in "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley*," he rejects the economic arguments that claim it is simply the best means of conserving property and stimulating production. Social scientists, mostly Marxists and Fascists in his day, are after all quite ready to suggest new and improved means for conserving and stimulating, and, once they've abolished marriage and the family as relics of the old economics, they will entrust arrangements for reproduction and child-care to the State. Lawrence dismisses these as short-term solutions to short-term problems. The Catholic Church, building on the wisdom of Mediterranean civilization, had a firmer understanding of "some, at least," of humani-

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ty's deeper, long-term desires and needs, and declared that, in Lawrence's words, "the element of *union* of mankind" depends on "the marriage-tie." Catholic "Christianity made marriage in some respects inviolate," independent of the State: "Man and wife, a king and queen with one or two subjects, and a few square yards of territory of their own: this, really, is marriage. It is a true freedom because it is a true fulfillment, for man, woman, and children." Lawrence continues:

> Is there not some peculiar harmony, through youth, the period of child-birth, the period of florescence and young children, the period of the woman's change of life, painful yet also a renewal, the period of waning passion but mellowing delight of affection, the dim, unequal period of the approach of death, when the man and woman look at one another with the dim apprehension of separation that is not really a separation: is there not . . . one symphony, made out of the soundless singing of two strange and incompatible lives, a man's and a woman's?

This often incantatory argument for marriage and the family insists not just on its "basically and permanently phallic" foundation, what Lawrence would call the male column of blood filling the female valley of blood, the bounds of each never breaking. It insists too on the stable constellation of man, woman, and, for their period of dependency, that man and woman's children.

That's what Connie is expecting, though she has to persuade Mellors that the extrinsic differences between them (he the gamekeeper has no money, she the aristocrat has an independent income) and his own dread of bringing children into a deathly world should not matter. He too is to be glad they'll have a child—"He kissed her belly and her mount of Venus, to kiss close to the womb and the fetus within the womb"—and, confessing his creed to himself as he penetrates that womb, he declares that "tenderness" to the child, like his "touch of tenderness" to its mother, will serve as the great counter-force in their "battle against the money, and the machine, and the insentient ideal monkeyishness of the world." Yes, "the creative act . . . is far more than procreative," but that statement is mainly a protest against the money-and-machine world's production quotas. That his "soul sprang towards her" at the moment "his seed sprang in her" effectually promises that what grows from the egg fertilized by the

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seed will be a creature for whom he will, with her, assume responsibility.

Now as I have said but must now show, this late-career theme of sexual responsibility is there in the early career too, blatantly in *The Rainbow* but, if we look for it, in *Sons and Lovers* also. Look carefully, that is. For the teller in *Sons and Lovers* is for the most part the voice of Lawrence getting well into his plea for a rhythmic balance of creaturely isolation and impersonal passion, cycling as it were between "Baby Tortoise," the tyro reptile that carries "All animate creation" on his shoulder, and the mature reptile of "Tortoise Shout" that is compelled by "the primeval rudiments of life" to mate—to be "crucified into sex." Bracketing for a spell the teller's anti-Victorian plea for a rougher, earthier view of sexuality, we can pick up from the tale of *Sons and Lovers* (I'm remembering Lawrence's injunction that we trust the "tale" more than the artist who tells it) the non-reptilian, human but still creaturely recognition that mind and spirit are quite as involved as loins in this business of creating and sustaining life.

Mind and spirit are patently what motivate Gertrude Morel once the work of her loins—conceiving, gestating, birthing—is done. Her remarkable "grit" in the quotidian tasks of caring for her husband, her children, and their house is such that several of the early reviewers immediately recognized her as "the heroic little mother," "a fine, true woman" in the mode of Victorian melodrama, toughly holding the family together despite the irresponsibilities of a spendthrift, sodden husband who is too pigheadedly contemptuous of his superiors at the mine ever to rise above the position of butty, the coal-face equivalent of lower-management. For all the beer and lack of vocational ambition, however, Morel is not the melodramatically "bad father" who beats his wife and children and gambles away whatever money he doesn't drink. There *are* flashes of violence—his throwing and locking his wife, pregnant with Paul, out into the night; his angry flinging of the table-drawer that strikes her above the eye; his actually hitting her in the face (an episode merely reported); or his near fisticuffs with William and later with Paul—but he's also capable of warm tenderness towards these same kin, and it's sad if not surprising when his wife's disillusioned standoffishness proves a model so irresistible that in the end even the last-born Arthur, the collier's favorite, "hates" him.

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But the wife and children's hate, or our own, mustn't altogether eclipse the love that for her was there in the beginning, and for them has been fostered by the admired scenes of fuse-making or of telling stories about the life down pit. The summary comment near the end of the poignant evocation, quite beyond praise, of William's first Christmas visit—"Everybody was mad with happiness in the family. Home was home, and they loved it with a passion of love, whatever the suffering had been"—has the ring of authenticity. *Odi et amo* was Lascelles Abercrombie's suggested subtitle for this novel. Whatever the ratio between these Catullan verbs, both must be kept in play.

Our ambivalent feelings about Morel clash intensely on the day of Paul's birth. He comes home from work, too tired to think. Served his beer by the neighbor Mrs. Bower, he "drank, gasped . . . drank, gasped" for all the world like a gorilla, without a care "that his wife was ill, that he had another boy." True, since he must sweat several pints every shift in the mine, he had better drink something, and no real miner is going to ask for lemonade rather than beer. But must a real miner grunt how thirsty he is, or point self-pityingly to his black face "smeared with sweat"? He will behave the same way before the Rev. Mr. Heaton, Paul's godfather, who drops in to talk theology with Mrs. Morel. This miner may be the blue-collar salt of the earth, which is admirable, but he habitually reminds women, children, and clerics of his sacrifices, which is deplorable. In any case, after he's drunk his pint, Morel reluctantly mounts the stairs to see his wife. No wallowing in suffering for her: "I s'll be all right."

> "A lad, tha says," he stammered.
>
> She turned down the sheet and showed the child.
>
> "Bless him!" he murmured. Which made her laugh, because he blessed by rote—pretending paternal emotion, which he did not feel just then.
>
> "Go now," she said.
>
> "I will my lass," he answered, turning away.
>
> Dismissed, he wanted to kiss her, but he dared not. She half wanted him to kiss her, but could not bring herself to give any signs. She only breathed freely when he was gone out of the room again, leaving behind him a faint smell of pit-dirt.

How nicely tensed are the emotions here: Morel's affections for wife and child are real enough; only, stammering, murmuring,

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exhausted, shy (how many days ago did he throw this woman out of the house at night?), and not exactly encouraged by her to offer a kiss, he has difficulty expressing them. At the same time, her laugh at his "pretending" a fatherly piety he is too tired *really* to feel at the moment is, if not polite, at least perceptive; her memory of his recent chucking her out must still be vivid; and surely, given her own social antecedents, she is not over-delicate in wishing he'd eliminate the "faint smell of pit-dirt" before offering a kiss.

In sum, Morel is neither the gorilla we may momentarily mistake him for, nor a kind sensitive controlled Mr. Heaton with muscles, but an imperfect husband whose virtues we have to consider seriously, and often in spite of what the not-always-fair teller says about him. And so with Mrs. Morel. Of course she's the heroic little mother, among whose qualities has been the passional shrewdness to feel, at the Christmas dance where she meets him, that the "sensuous flame of life" in this dancing man, his ringing laugh "soft, non-intellectual, warm, a kind of gambolling," might just be the force to moderate the uncomfortably baffling incandescence of her own intellectuality. But she's also the stern "puritan" who, once that fateful dance and the nine months of post-wedding happiness are over, simply decides that her husband is fiscally dishonest, intemperate, incorrigible—someone to be "dismissed." Her marriage has been a mistake, and hereafter her own power of "thought and spirit," turning away from his phallic-if-you-wish candle flame, will endure apart from him. Which means she'll do everything she can for her sons, who she hopes will become men after the middle-class pattern her husband both disdains and can never follow.

What do these sons have to reflect on when looking for their own women? Initially of course they don't reflect at all: they act and react as the local culture and their unconscious desires dictate. A prize-winning athlete and quite the stud in a Highlander kilt, William pursues the bold sort of girls who pursue him—i.e., the sort who go to dances and incur his mother's disfavor. He assures her, while he burns their letters, that they are only (to use the dialect) fribbles to spoon with; that his real love remains for her. And when in London he becomes engaged to Lily (he calls her "Gyp," which may make some of us remember Dora's lap dog, so like herself, in *David Copperfield*), he feels he

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has to follow through and marry her, since he's "gone too far" to back out. Meaning, quite obviously, that he has slept with her and, whether she's pregnant or not, that her social position would be cruelly compromised if he jilted her now. It's Jude Fawley and Arabella all over again: the woman may be no better than she should be, but the honorable young man, half-falling and half-pulled into bed, will do his duty by her. Mrs. Morel is a realist, properly insisting that her boy not sacrifice himself needlessly. Assuming that Lily is not pregnant after all, she urges William in effect not to feel bound by any promise implied in having slept with her. If he feels Lily is incompatible (all sex, no ideas), then he should take a lesson from his mother's misallying herself with an all sex, no ideas sort of person two decades ago, and back out. Observe her implied principle: premarital intercourse is hazardous and should be resisted, but if one has escaped the hazard—if there's been no conception—then one remains free to look about. Poor William however is not looking about; he just stares across the room. "Only his mother could help him now. And yet, he would not let *her* decide for him. He stuck to what he had done" (my emphasis). He wants to separate from his mother—by at least making his own decision—but the woman he insists on choosing is what Freud would call a degraded object, so unlike his mother that he can feel no affection. Thus, by the logic of this family romance, he soon dies. As Paul, with popular Darwinism on his mind, will later tell Miriam without really understanding its application to himself, the cause of William's death lay in his having gone "wrong somewhere"—having strayed from the "proper way" nature had mapped out for him, as she's mapped it in different fashions for everyone.

We have to infer for ourselves what, according to nature's map (and not just Mrs. Morel's prescriptions), William's or Paul's "proper way" is, but with regard to choosing a woman other than their mother to love, the tale reveals that someone *too* other—someone in William's case like Lily—is not the ticket. Paul's Miriam is from one point of view too *similar* to his mother. We can't imagine her dancing or putting up with "the faint smell of pit-dirt," and if anything she goes Mrs. Morel one better in the pursuit of bookish ideas and Congregational religiosity. Paul's Clara, on the other hand, does for him what Lily has done for William—shows him the depths of impersonal, unreflecting sex-

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ual intercourse and its connections, peewits and stars in choral accompaniment, with the throbbing cosmos. Neither Miriam nor Clara quite answers his needs, in part because he's still affectively tied to his mother, in part because each is in some way imbalanced or incomplete. Seriocomically put, it's a problem of Miriam being top-heavy (mind and spirit outweighing loins) and Clara being bottom-heavy (loins outweighing mind and spirit).

This is familiar though still-contested territory in the criticism; the teller tells us much about it. What's never mentioned by him and is scarcely mentioned by the critics is something else the tale directs Paul and us to reflect on. He says he wants unreflective impersonal love, and is angry when Miriam, with her eye-contact during coition, compels him *to* reflect, to *be* personal. Reflect about what? Primarily it's about what Arabella in her scheming way gets Jude to consider: the consequences of their coition, not least the possibility of pregnancy.

> "We belong to each other," he said.
> "Yes."
> "Then why shouldn't we belong to each other all together?"
> "But—" she faltered.
> "I know it's a lot to ask," he said. "But there's not much risk for you really—not in the Gretchen way. You can trust me there?"
> "Oh I can trust you!" The answer came quick and strong. "It's not that—it's not that at all—but—"

She's also afraid of what her own mother has for years said to her about the farmyard dreadfulness of intercourse. But Paul's interrogative "trust me," supposing it to mean that if she gets pregnant he won't play Faust to her Gretchen but will marry her, as his younger brother Arthur has married the three-months pregnant Beatrice, is rather glib. Economically and certainly psychologically, he's even less prepared for marriage than Arthur. He is putting the finally-succumbing Miriam at some risk. The youth of Edwardian Derbyshire seem, on the evidence of this novel, to have no access to contraceptives, and abortion is expensively out of reach for farm- and factory-girls. Thus when Susan, one of the girls at Jordan's, finds herself pregnant and has to quit (company rules? disgrace? needing to join the faraway father?), Paul, in whom she's confided, tells her he's sorry. " 'But you'll see it'll turn out all right. You'll make the best of it,' he continued, rather

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wistfully." Thus the joys not just of society's but of nature's double standard.

His wistfulness may stem from more than sympathy for Susan; he may also be thinking about how Miriam or his new lover, Clara, might through his cavalier demands that they "belong to each other all together" be Susanized. Note that his mother bids him think precisely about that possibility with Clara—not exclusively that she might become pregnant but also that she is married to Baxter Dawes, and that Nottingham is sufficiently remote from Paris to make her a talked-about woman. It's bad enough for her reputation that she has separated from Baxter; it will be worse if she's seen going around with a young man seven years her junior. This concern is not maternal jealousy, as Paul oedipally suggests; it's one woman's consciousness that another woman can be made miserable as well as poor by her neighbors' disapprobation. Paul's reply—Clara "hasn't much to lose"—comes from ignorant bravado: "No—her life's nothing to her, so what's the worth of nothing? She goes with me—it becomes something. Then she must pay, we both must pay. Folks are so frightened of paying—they'd rather starve than pay." Exactly the attitude of the man who bolted with Frieda Weekley, but Clara will soon be furious when, at the proceedings against Baxter for having thrown Mr. Jordan down the stairs, her name comes up as the *casus belli.* " '*Cherchez la femme!*' smiled the magistrate," but *la femme* isn't smiling. Baxter's violence could as well be directed at her as at Jordan or Paul, and the other women at the factory have already given her the silent treatment. That Paul resists his mother's warnings about the social dangers to which he's exposing Clara is healthy in a way: he needs after all to break free from his mother. Yet in this case we can appreciate how simplistic that "break free" slogan is, for his mother is offering him a feminine insight into Clara's position that, in his masculine self-centeredness, he could use. "Mum and dad," to cite Philip Larkin, may "fuck you up," but they can also set you right.

It would be quixotic to claim that *Sons and Lovers* is a "family values" tale forwarding a simple case for benign parental influence, and for chastity before and fidelity after marriage. Parental influence and marriage, it is clear, are hugely complex and embattled issues in the book. The epithalamic dimension of "A Propos *Lady Chatterley*" cited above or Mellors' paean to chastity

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(not specifically premarital, needless to say) are only voices in the extremely polyphonic Laurentian *oeuvre*. Some of those voices do endorse a (so to say) viva-sexual exploration, if not a techno-sexual experimentation, without regard to marital status or promissory notes about the future. Others emphasize the importance of distinguishing authentic from inauthentic marriages, Lawrence himself having broken up one of the latter in order to create one of the former, and feeling strongly that a "greater morality" justified what he had done as it would have justified Tolstoy's Anna and Vronsky, or Hardy's Tess and Angel, had they had courage equal to his. We should however listen to those voices that underwrite what in his day as in ours seem like old-fashioned ideals of chastity and fidelity, both having directly to do not just with the man and the woman in "star equilibrium" but with their prospective children and their relations with other people—their social position among those who matter, if only their families, their neighbors, and their fellow workers. And this, especially when such voices emanate from the tales rather than from the tellers. In *Sons and Lovers* such voices ask us to be aware, as Lawrence would say elsewhere, of the real-life relations between men and women—now in marriage, the imperfect union of the Morels, and now in approaches to marriage, in all that Paul must reflect on consciously, as well as experience unconsciously, in the course of his viva-sexual explorations.

A hermeneutic note. Just as I've acknowledged that it would be quixotic to claim that *Son and Lovers* is at bottom "about" chastity before and fidelity after marriage, so it was quixotic of Lawrence to regard *Anna Karenina* as at bottom an exposure of Anna and Vronsky's funking it "merely because people at the opera turn backs on [them]! As if people's backs weren't preferable to their faces, anyhow!" Yet each theme is decidedly bodied forth in the tale of each novel. To claim this is not to measure the theme's distance from its novel's center of gravity, or to weigh it relative to other themes. That's another critical task. My present project has been to do with Lawrence what he did with Tolstoy: to uncover a concern both ignored by the teller, who for the most part carries Paul's brief, and lately neglected by the greater number of (mostly feminist) anti-Paulinists. Rather than offer fruitless condemnations of "the patriarchy," one needs to particularize. If Mrs. Morel places all her hopes in her sons, it's not just because she's

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disappointed in her husband; it's because, given her domestic jobs, her work in the Co-Operative Movement can never be more than part-time, and in any case—this is Edwardian England—will not significantly alter social conditions in her lifetime. Or if Clara, the strident Suffragist, is persuaded by Paul that her real fulfillment will come first in making love with him, and then in returning, as the overwhelmingly stronger partner, to her marriage with Baxter (yes, this is another plug for marriage, but what a letdown!), it's not just that sexual love matters immensely; it's that she hasn't been vocationally trained for anything other than lace-making at home and stocking-making at Jordan's. Lawrence's point is that, once women have the vote and the economic and political power that education can bring, there remains the question of their relations with men. It won't do to champion the book's disadvantaged women in isolation from the hero—as in "Who needs *him*?" This not only dumps "our Paul," it irresponsibly lets him off the hook.

Keeping not only Paul *on* the hook, but also the contested questions about sexual intercourse, courtship and marriage, and the relations between mothers, fathers, and children: clearly it calls for a strong hook—that is, a novel sufficiently well-wrought to contain if not resolve the problems those questions lead to. At least half-a-dozen of Lawrence's longer fictions are strong in this way, and behind my special plea on this occasion for *Sons and Lovers* is the desire that as readers we may become sufficiently strong (and supple) once again to do those fictions justice. The sometimes untrustworthy *personae* of the tellers have over the past quarter century too often riled us up, and the fog of sex wars has obscured the candescent many-sidedness of the tales. Their aesthetic value—not just their narrative shape, their emblematic pattern, or their rhythm of summary, scene, and reflection, but the centrality and complexity of the experience they represent—is surely what a would-be nonpartisan criticism ought to describe and defend. To recur to my opening equivoque about "the end of sex," such criticism shows the dynamism of a great novel like *Sons and Lovers*: within it are the energies of the sexual revolution *and* of a corrective counterrevolution. We need them both.

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ANNE STEVENSON

# The Miracle of Camp 60

(The speaker is a fictive Italian ex-POW revisiting the Italian Chapel on the Orkney Island of Lamb Holm in 1992.)

Amici d'arti, amici dei fiori, amici d'amore,
when in our towns they told us *go fight for Il Duce*
we Dolomiti had to go. We were . . . coscritti, we
had no choice. I wept when I departed from Trento,
my poor mother, my so sad new young wife.
Credi in Dio, we embraced each other as the train
stretched us apart. But then in the deeps of misery
I had some luck. My seat-partner, how do you say,
was Chiocchetti. L'artista Domenico Chiocchetti
of Moena, a man very sensitive . . . you understand?
And so he saw my tears. With him he kept always—
like this, around his neck—a spiritual picture,
*Madonna delle Olive*—Our Lady of the Olives—
of our great Italian painter, Nicolo Barabina.
This medallion Domenico let me hold, for hope,
as the train transported us human meats to Roma,
then to Tunis, to Egitto, to fight the war.
See over the altar, the Madonna of Chioccetti,
*Regina Pacis, Ora Pro Nobis.* As we prayed many many times
in that desert of death under the stars.
Our prayers were answered when Tommy beat us.
No more did we have to fear the brute Tedeschi.
So we were glad. Not to be prisoners, you understand,
but to be not any longer soldiers, while we were sad
not to go home. We did not know what was happening
in our country, to our families. When we came to Orkeny,
we did not know where we were, so far, so . . . smorta
this terrible island, not one tree, not one flower.

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Only polvere, calcina, cemento . . . everywhere
filo barbato—all sunshine strangled in it—and huts
we would use for pigs in Italy, to share.

Only Chiocchetti saw . . . a holy place.
Look, he pointed through the wires, the azure water,
isole, islands, emerald in the sea. He was painting them
already in his head while we worked through rain and wind
to build the barriers. Labour we did not mind.
Better to work than to despair. Even so,
there was too much time to think of home.
Before the war my occupation was giardinere.
I made gardens for the city of Merano.
(After I went back, I was the capo.) One day on Lamb Holm
I spied among the rocks a small flower, an iris rare
in Italy, and I thought, here we could grow plants,
make little beds, walkways, sentieri.

So with some men I went to the Commandante. "Please
may we have some seeds." Seeds? he was surprised.
He found us seeds and bulbs, in some months we had iris,
geranio, calendula, lupini, giglio—you say lily?
We made your desert bloom. Now, why not a piazza with a
statue?
"OK," says Chiocchetti, "without marble, I carve cemento;
without bronze, I twist barbed wire." Eccola,
the marvel he created! St. George spearing the Dragon.
To show the wish of us Italians to exterminate evil.
Into the base we put our names and coins we saved
from home. Our padre, Gioachino Giacobazzi, swung his
censer.
We wept for sadness and joy because from memory
we had made in our ugly camp a dream of Italy.

Allora, came winter and the long nights. We found
some space for a teatro; talented men among us played
harmonica, mandolin; always we prisoners had the spirit
to make beauty, but up to that time we had no church,
no place of God to celebrate mass. Yet once again

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il padre, Chiocchetti and myself were called to Major
Buckland,
"Signori, you are Catholics. Do not you need a chapel?"
That English Major was, I think, exceptional. Under his
traditional reserve beat surely the Italian heart.
A short time and two new huts appeared, placed end to end
—like so—to make one bigger one.
And now the talent of Chiocchetti became genius.
He picked skilled helpers and they, too, caught fire.
Palumbo, who studied metal-working in America, contrived
from scrap—gracile, delicato—the screen of iron.
And Bruttapasta whose speciality was concrete.
Regard his altar, made out of just cemento; the same for
la facciata, colonne, campanile, pinnacoli, vetri—
painted in all colori, l'arco, i pedimenti. Also, in sandstone,
la testa di Cristo crocefisso that was moulded by Pinesi.
It was as if, on this far island, by the mercy of God,
we few had been chosen to prepare in a world destroyed
a home for the immortal dove who alone brings peace
to men and women. Regard—on the vault of the sanctuary
in the fresco of Chiocchetti—white dove among angels.

Mi scusate. Excuse me. I am incapable of beholding this place
without tears. War was good to us. We were prisoners
but we were happy, making our chapel beautiful.
Happier than ever again. When the war finished
we had to depart. I sobbed because we had not finished.
I wept again in Merano. La mia madre, morta . . . my poor
wife,
you know what i bruti soldati did to beautiful women,
we could not have children. To forgive myself for joy
while my loved ones suffered—so many suffered—
it was not easy. Chiocchetti did not come home with us.
He stayed to complete his font, and when I met him in
Moena—
many many years later—he told me he, too, felt guilty.
But guilt is not right, he said, for art is joy.
Short is our suffering in this life, joy is forever.
Now, an old man, I visit again our joyful chapel

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to read, in your language, a prayer of blessed Francis.
"Lord make me an instrument of peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
where there is injury, pardon,
where there is darkness, light,
where there is sadness . . . gioia, la gioia."

Note: Domenico Chioccetti died at Moena on 7 May 1999.

## Innocence and Experience

1942

I laid myself down as a woman
and woke as a child.
Sleep buried me up to my chin,
but my brain cut wild.

Sudden summer lay sticky as tar
under bare white feet.
Stale, soot-spotted heapings of winter
shrank in the street.

Black headlines, infolded like napkins,
crashed like grenades
as war beat its way porch by porch
up New Haven's façades.

Europe: a brown hive of noises,
Hitler inside.
On the too sunny shelf by the stairs
my tadpoles died.

Big boys had already decided
who'd lose and who'd score,
singing one potato, two potato,
three potato, four.

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Singing sticks and stones
may break my bones
(but names hurt more).

Singing step on a crack,
break your mother's back
(her platinum-ringed finger).

Singing who got up your mother
when your daddy wasn't there?
Singing allee allee infree! You're
dead, you're dead, wherever you are!

## Postscriptum

Now I am dead,
no words,
just a wine
of my choosing.

Drink to my
mute consent,
my rite of
dissolving.

Over my chalk
eyelids and wax skin
let a wild
reticence in.

Not a tear
or false look.
Poems, stay there
in your book.

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Should passion
attend me,
let it flow freely
through Messiaen's

terrible Quartet:
unendurable riddles
for the clarinet,
resolved in a fiddle's

remorseless,
forgiving ascent.

## Vertigo

Mind led body
to the edge of the precipice.
They stared in desire
at the naked abyss.
If you love me, said mind,
take that step into silence.
If you love me, said body,
turn and exist.

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PETER MAKUCK

# The Trouble with Smitty

June 1998, Phoenix. I'm having my first cup of coffee. Thoreau's notion of morning and moral renewal goes down hard when you look at the front page of *The Arizona Republic*: HESTON HAS GUN FOES IN SIGHTS AS NRA CHIEF. The article makes reference to some of Charlton Heston's film leads (Moses, El Cid, Thomas Jefferson), then describes his acceptance speech as president of the National Rifle Association. Near the end of the story, he tells the interviewing journalist that he keeps a loaded shotgun next to his bed and wouldn't hesitate to use it.

But wait. Two local gun stories also appear on the front page: SUPERVISOR WRESTLES GUN FROM WORKER and TEEN ARRESTED IN DOUBLE SLAYING. The latter tells us that one Bobby Purcell, 16, was arrested after having bragged to a friend that he wasted two kids with a sawed-off shotgun. The two victims were honors students at Apollo High School: Renelyn Simmons and André Bradley. Purcell and a buddy stopped in front of a popular teen hangout. Purcell got out of the car and fired into a crowd of ten or fifteen students.

Let's not be geographically smug: the dateline could be Any City, USA.

Growing up in New London, Connecticut, I regularly went to the Saturday matinee at the Garde Theater, usually a biff-pow double-header where a black-hatted bad guy finally winced at the hot lead, grabbed his gut, and crumpled thunderously to the floor of the saloon, or fell from a roof, a high cliff, or a galloping horse. But no blood. Sometimes it was a Tarzan movie, or something about Romans, Christians, gladiators, and chariot races. The matinee was a ritual. Once, in July, after a double feature with Tarzan and Jane, we hiked home as usual but with a detour that took us through the woods to the back of Bottinelli Monument Company. My friend Gary knew where thick hemp

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ropes (hemp wouldn't scratch the polished tombstones) were often discarded—just the thing to mimic vines that carried Tarzan in great long arcs from tree to tree. Benny, a fearless climber, tied the rope to the top of a tall oak that leaned over Lake Brandagee where, at the end of long outward arcs, we dove toward imagined crocodiles, just like Johnny Weissmuller.

Another time, after seeing *The Three Musketeers*, we found curtain rods poking from a trash can on Broad Street and—forgetting "All for one and one for all"—slashed away at each other, using stairs and parking meters for advantage, the swashbuckling coming to an end when David's forearm turned red with rivulets of blood.

*Fort Apache* and an endless series of cowboy-and-Indian movies had us making bows and arrows. The arrows (dowels pilfered from my father's shop and fletched with chicken feathers) we tipped with a piece of hacksaw blade (shaped and sharpened on a grinding wheel) so that they would stick into trees and sheds as they did into prairie schooners, homesteaders' shacks, and the backs of cavalrymen.

In our woodsy neighborhood, there seemed an inevitable progression from rock-throwing (to sink floating cans and bottles) to snowball and crab apple fights, to slingshots and wild cherries (ripe cherries exploded nicely against white T-shirts, a pre-echo of Hollywood blood squibs), to BB-gunfights with a rule against headshots. (Yuppie paintball with pads and visored helmets seems tame by comparison.) The rules said that, when hit, you had to fall and die the way they did in the movies. You could say you hadn't been hit, but the shooter could demand to check under your shirt, and an angry red welt was hard to blame on anything but a sizzling BB.

Where were our parents? Most were at home, but skillfully placed in the dark, as many parents are, by clever, deceiving children.

My niece's husband, John, somehow refused to be molded. He told me about growing up in Oregon, about his memories of grandfathers and uncles posing with bloody trophies of the hunt. A lover of animals, he could never understand the family obsession with guns and hunting. A few years ago John's grandfather, in his eighties, went into the basement with a shotgun because his

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wife had seen a snake coiled up near the washing machine. She begged her husband to let it alone or to use a shovel to deal with it. But the grandfather had been a stubborn man. John said, "When my grandfather pulled the trigger of his favorite twelve gauge that morning, he put an end to three things: the snake, the hot water heater, and what little hearing he had left."

But cut to a more lethal Oregon tale: After successfully badgering his father to buy him a hunting rifle, Kipland Kinkel (only weeks ago at this writing) killed both of his parents and opened fire on his high-school classmates in Springfield, killing two and injuring dozens.

My wife Phyllis and I are house-sitting for a few weeks at the Phoenix home of my brother-in-law, a pediatric surgeon, and I'm using his desk. At the top of a stack of his papers and medical journals are stapled articles he has collected on gun-related injuries and deaths. A grim picture quickly sketches itself. In a ten year period, slightly over 8,000 deaths in Arizona alone. 5,158 suicides. 2,415 homicides. 249 accidental deaths. 109 fatal injuries inflicted by police. In 1995, according to the Centers for Disease Control, firearms were the ninth leading cause of death (35,957), just behind AIDS (43,155). The CDC also reports that the United States leads the world's 26 richest countries in firearm deaths by 14.24% per 100,000 people. Northern Ireland is second at 6.63%. Japan is last on the list at 0.05%. Among European countries, England, with strict gun laws, is lowest: 0.41%.

There is a follow-up in this morning's *Arizona Republic* about Bobby Purcell, the teenager who killed the two high-school honors students. Asked why he did it, he told police the students had dissed him.

Ah, so that was it. But he didn't even know them. And what constitutes being dissed? Perhaps the students were guilty of the unforgivable: eye contact.

*The fuck you lookin at*? Blam! Blam!

I'm trying to understand why the gun has replaced the fist to settle scores among teenagers. Easy access? The old equalizing factor?

Also in this morning's newspaper is another piece about Charlton Heston. It's not about his films, but that's what I'm

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thinking about. I'm also thinking about an essay by a scuba diver who claims to be transformed morally and spiritually by his experiences in the counterworld of water. It makes me wonder if actors are in any way transformed by immersion in their roles in the counterworld of film? Heston, in interviews, is quite proud of his role in *Ben-Hur*, a film in which his character drops an agenda of hatred and revenge and becomes a kinder, gentler person after meeting face to face with Christ along the *via dolorosa*. But this was just one of Heston's many roles. If the actor has learned anything, it seems to be Western-style revenge with Old Testament overtones from movies like *Will Penny* and *The Last Hard Men*. But why he would now choose to play Moses descending from Mt. Sinai with a golden assault rifle is perhaps a mystery that lies deep beneath the planet of the apes, or is maybe no mystery at all.

In Utah in the early nineties, I became the one-year colleague of a prof I'll call Paul Brady, an ex-gunnery sergeant, also a rancher, hunter, and horseman. A poet too, but we didn't talk much about poetry or literature, at least not at first. I had lots of questions about the mountains and deserts. Paul was a man with answers, and a fine storyteller. Soon we were talking about hawks and eagles, bear and elk, and that led to hunting and guns.

I told him that a Daisy BB gun was my first rifle, a lever action, the kind favored by cowboys like John Wayne's Hondo. But I discovered that a pump action model was more powerful and could put a hole in a beer can, so I traded up. I had also heard that you could kill a squirrel with pump. A bloodthirsty teenager, I was hot to shoot anything that moved: bumblebees on flowers, butterflies, birds, frogs, snakes, squirrels, rabbits, stray cats and dogs. But getting my first BB gun was not easy.

My mother, raised in the city, hated guns, and admirably resisted my endless pleas. She said that a gun was dangerous to have around, good for only one thing, killing, and worse, it always begged to be fired. (Did I smile years later when reading an essay by Robert Penn Warren who makes a similar point about the crossbow in Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*?) But it was almost inevitable that I would graduate from a bow and arrow to BB guns because they were already in the family: my cousins had them. And my grandfather used a .22 on foxes and hawks that

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carried off his chickens at the farm. Like Kipland Kinkel, I begged and badgered until I was given an air rifle, a Daisy Defender, for my thirteenth birthday.

Paul Brady was amused by my mother's strong negative feelings about a mere hunk of machined steel. You didn't even have to ask for a rifle if you were born on a ranch in the Utah outback as Paul had been. In any case, after my Daisy Defender came two more BB guns, a pump and a Red Ryder model, a single shot Crossman pellet pistol, a single shot bolt-action Remington .22, a three-shot Mossberg 16 gauge shotgun, and a Ruger semi-automatic .22 rifle. There were also pistols, a .22 Colt and a .32 Smith & Wesson. This mad acquisitiveness lasted only a short time, three years max, whereupon I sold everything in order to buy a Corvette engine for my customized '49 Ford, thereby ending one dubious obsession in favor of another. The prophetic and painfully ironic line from a John Lennon tune really applied to a teenager like me: "Happiness is a warm gun."

I haven't owned a gun since high school, but during the time I was afflicted with a lovesickness for firearms, if available and affordable, I'd probably have convinced myself I needed a flamethrower, a bazooka, and a few Stinger missiles. A friend from my teen years is still a collector and on Sundays goes out to a range in Connecticut and fires his Thompson .45 caliber submachine gun with a 50-round drum clip. (The weapon is also known as a Tommy Gun or, charmingly, a "grease gun.") Ammo is quite expensive but the rush, I've been assured, is "incredible." Who needs Viagra?

The connection between gun and penis, of course, has been written about, nonsensically I've often thought, but it doesn't take long to make a list of connections. Think of Sally Struthers fellating Al Letieri's .357 Magnum in *The Getaway*, or consider the size of Clint Eastwood's piece in *Dirty Harry* (another Magnum), or Hugh O'Brien's long-barreled Buntlime Special in the old *Wyatt Earp*. Law and Order depends on the lawman being able to speak softly and wag a big stick. Or think of the old Marine marching chant: "This is my rifle, this is my gun. One is for fighting, one is for fun." Once when I congratulated a friend on his wife's being pregnant for the first time, he said, "What, did you think I was firing blanks?"

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I was a graduate student at Kent State University when four students were killed on May 4, 1970. James Michener, in his book on Kent State, observes that, politics of the Vietnam War aside, the college-aged guardsmen were obsessed with the sexual freedom and long hair of the student protesters and their sexually explicit language. In that tragic confrontation, institutional penis power prevailed. It became quickly apparent the young guardsmen, proxies of the old generals and Dick Nixon, weren't firing blanks.

In Ernest Hemingway's posthumous *Islands in the Stream*, we read: " 'How long have you been my girl,' he said to the pistol. 'Don't answer. Lie there good and I'll see you get to kill something better than land crabs when the time comes.' " Such an utterance, of course, is the stuff of conference papers and textbooks. But in his very first novel, in the persona of impotent Jake Barnes, Hemingway was already worrying about manhood, emotional death, and firing blanks. As we know, he went out firing the real stuff.

But back to Paul Brady, my Utah colleague. One day I was talking to Paul about where Phyllis and I might do some hiking. A recent convert to house cats, I'd become fascinated by them and wanted to see a big wild one, a cougar. I had heard stories about how deep snow would drive them from the high mountains down into the valley where they would sometimes show up in backyards looking for food in the form of a small dog or cat. Paul wanted to introduce me to a friend who hunted mountain lions so I could go along. Could I ride a horse? I said yes, but hedged. I didn't want to tell him I had been upset by an article in the *Salt Lake Tribune* reporting that in Utah alone 127 big cats had been legally killed the previous year. How many illegally? No wonder mule deer were thick as grasshoppers and often jumped in front of your car.

"Paul, I'm not—"

As if reading my mind, he said, "No, they just let the dogs run them up a tree. Then they take a picture."

Still, I begged off, saying that Phyllis didn't ride.

"Okay," he said. "I'll tell you where to go, but you have to promise me something."

"What?"

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"You've got to take a pistol with you."

"Paul, I don't want to kill one of these animals."

"You won't have to," he said. "Just a shot in the air will be enough to discourage one from coming at you."

"But—"

"Peter, you get way back in one of these narrow sandrock canyons where I'm sending you, and you meet up with a mama and kittens, you're going to wish you never saw a cougar."

"Okay," I said, "but I really don't want to go through all the trouble and expense of getting a permit or buying a weapon."

"Number one, you don't need a permit," he said. "Number two, I've got just the thing for you."

I simply nodded, thinking Paul would invite me to his house, show me his sizeable collection, then pick out something suitable for a loaner. Next week, or the week after. I could put him off. He'd forget and I'd be off the hook. I faded briefly into another moment.

West Virginia, 1976. I was teaching at a small state college in the woods. Just after Easter break, the weather had broken, and four of us were in Kenny's Volvo wagon, headed down the road to play some doubles on the clay courts at Oglebay Park. Talk in the car was of a sweep through the dorms by campus security while the students were on spring break. The cops had confiscated something like twenty weapons: handguns, rifles, and shotguns.

My friend Mike was outraged. "You're kidding, right?"

Dave said no. "It was in the newspaper this morning."

Kenny said, "Hell, these kids are West Virginians."

Mike asked if that was supposed to mean something.

Kenny said, "Look around. This is hunting country."

I said that if a survey were taken, we would probably find out that more than half the faculty was armed.

"Come off it," said Mike.

"I've got a 30.06," said Kenny. "And a Beretta nine mil, a beauty—15 in the mag, one in the pipe."

I laughed.

"What!" said Mike, disbelief in his voice. "*Why?*"

"I used to hunt," said Kenny.

"With a Beretta?" I asked, laughing.

"Beretta?" said Mike.

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"A pistol. For protection," said Kenny.

"From what?" asked Mike. "Farmers, aggressive co-eds?"

Dave laughed, then said sheepishly, "I've got a .45 automatic, Colt, Army issue."

I was cackling. I couldn't help myself. Mike shook his head gloomily and said, "Not funny."

"Maybe not, but I was right. Half the faculty, in this car at least, is armed."

Mike asked Dave why he had a gun. For a number of reasons he was an unlikely candidate. Dave said, "I forgot to turn it in when I was discharged from the Army."

"Forgot?"

Dave finished it all with a line I've heard many times since: "Better to have a gun and not need it, than to need it and not have one." He delivered the line with all the wooden gravity of a Charlton Heston.

Paul Brady, from behind his desk, brought me back to the present. "Here you go," he said, removing a pistol from its holster, and handing it to me.

".38 Smith & Wesson," I said, trying to appear casual, as if it were perfectly normal for a university prof to pull a holstered .38 out of his desk drawer. "Snubby."

"Feel the balance."

"Feels good," I said. "Nice little Smitty."

"That's the .32 frame I mounted it on. Lighter."

"Terrific grips," I said.

"Packmier," he said with a big grin. He was proud of his gunsmithing and amused at my reaction, which was increasingly self-conscious. There were students passing in the open doorway.

"Paul—"

He tossed me the holster. "Keep it as long as you want."

I saw two things simultaneously: Paul's face, friendly and grinning, with Phyllis' face superimposed, dark and frowning. Paul had made a gesture of friendship and, given all I had told him about my own past with guns, refusal would have been tantamount to rejection. But how was I going to explain the Smitty to Phyllis? I thanked Paul, put the gun into the inside pocket of my sport jacket, and tried to make a casual exit.

Once in the hall, I felt that everyone knew I was packing. My

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jacket hung lopsidedly. Trying to get to my office as quickly as possible to hide the weapon, I ran into the Chair of the Department who, friendly as ever, stopped me to ask how I was enjoying my year in Utah so far. My face felt scarlet. I was sure he could read something wrong, but our exchange of pleasantries seemed long enough for some entry in the *Guinness Book of World Records.*

Phyllis. My wife grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, historically a mob city geared to guns, bloody sidewalks, and dead bodies. But Phyllis had no experience with guns. Like my mother, she hates them. There were no firearms in her home. Some of her uncles hunted rabbits and squirrels and she admits to having eaten rabbit. But she was removed from the bloody process. Like my mother, she knew that guns were made for only one thing and wanted nothing to do with them. She knew that as a teenager I had been a card-carrying member of the N.R.A. She also knew about the furbearing animals I trapped for money. She was amused by my adolescent adventures. She heard stories, too, from my mother herself, about how she hated to go into the basement to do laundry during trapping or hunting season. There were always muskrats, foxes, and raccoons (the "Davy Crockett" TV series created a great demand for coonskin caps) hanging from the joists on hooks, waiting for me to get home from school to skin them and stretch the pelts on fur frames.

Phyllis forgave me my unenlightened adolescence. It was before Animal Rights, before the Vietnam War, and before criticism of our gun culture came to the fore. She also found it easy to forgive my teenage love affair with guns because it was in the distant past. But news that we now had a handgun in our apartment would be as welcome as news that I had taken a mistress and was hoping she could move in with us. An acquaintance once told me what he did was his own business, and what his wife didn't know wouldn't hurt her. He was discreet, he said. I never bought that line of thinking, but I was in a tight spot. I'd hide the gun. Phyllis wouldn't know. I'd be discreet.

My mother's strenuous aversion to guns parallels my own to carnivals, but when my son was in the sixth grade, I found myself on a hot August midway that seethed with dust and a seedy vigor.

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We moved through the smell of elephant flop, past the Fun-O-Rama, past knock-down dolls and a sideshow tent that read "Wolf Boy" and "Pig with Two Heads." When the boys climbed aboard the Tilt-O-Whirl, I pointed and said I would meet them by the bingo tent. Then, half-hidden by the calliope notes of a carousel, I heard another kind of music: the unmistakable crack and metallic clank of a shooting gallery.

I was surprised to see pump-action Remingtons firing .22 shorts. This was rural North Carolina. Ducks and lighted candles went from left to right. There were also clay pipes and fixed paper targets. I hadn't fired a rifle in almost twenty years and wondered if my eye was still good. Guessing the sights were deliberately off, I shot first at the paper bull for a test. Sights were low and to the left, so I made the mental correction. Ducks fell and candles went out. I was enjoying myself. After three or four clips I quit, but before I did, my son and his pals arrived and watched with great interest.

They wanted to try. No, I said, this was not for kids. They whined and wheedled but fortunately I had a sign on my side: "Shooters Must Be At Least 16 Years Old." I had a prize coming and let my son choose.

"That," he pointed.

It was a red Super Soaker, the squirt gun equivalent of a .357 Magnum.

I thought nothing of the incident. That night my wife told me Keith was impressed by my shooting. Because I owned no guns, had never shot one in front of him, he had no idea I knew how to use a rifle, and was doubly surprised that I was able to win a prize. Before going to bed, he asked me some questions. I told him I used to hunt and that in high school I had been on the rifle team (I didn't tell him that a yearbook photo shows me, a James Dean clone, between two other shooters, also collar-up clones, who are furtively flipping off the photographer, the teachers, the town, and the galaxy). I could see he was impressed. Secretly I was glad. It was probably the only thing I had done up to that point that impressed him. I was a college professor, but that meant nothing. My books, nothing. I thought: *Lord, this might be my legacy.* I imagined myself long gone and him fondly shaking his head and telling a buddy: "Yeah, my ol' daddy was a helluva shot."

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I drove to our apartment in Orem, seeing little along the way, even though it had snowed the night before and the last sun was making the peaks of Mt. Timpanogos dazzle. I had the Smitty in my briefcase. When I entered the apartment, I yelled "Hey, it's me" and headed upstairs to the room where I had made some cinder block bookshelves, and a desk out of an old door. Fortunately, Phyllis was on the phone in the kitchen. I quickly took the gun and put it where I had planned—at the back of a top shelf in our closet. In Utah for only a year, we had little furniture, and there was no place to hide anything. I'm much taller than my wife and knew she'd have no cause to look on a shelf that was empty, or appeared so from her level.

That done, I pulled off my tie, changed into Wranglers, and went downstairs. It was Friday night, as I recall, and we would follow our usual Friday ritual, dinner and a movie, which meant Salt Lake City where there were more film offerings, nicer restaurants, and where it was easier to get a drink. (In Mormon Country it is far easier to buy a handgun than a glass of wine.)

"What's so funny?" Phyllis asked me.

My secret must have had me smirking. "Nothing," I said. "Just glad it's Friday." Then I told her about my classes and a few amusing things that had happened during the day.

Later, in the restaurant, waiting for the entrees, I sipped my wine, listening to her talk about her parents, both not doing well physically, and about her plans to fly down to Phoenix for a week's visit. All the while, I could see Smitty on the top shelf of the closet in his leather holster. There came upon me an urge to confess. I was close to telling my story. A business consultant and former teacher of technical writing, Phyllis might be interested to learn what Paul Brady, also a teacher of technical writing, was doing with that handgun in his desk.

*What was he doing with it?* I imagined her asking.

I rehearsed my reply. He uses it to desensitize students, a number of them women who have irrational fears about a hunk of machined steel. He makes them describe the revolver in detail as if it were any piece of machinery. He has them open the cylinder, spin, close, engage the safety, cock the hammer, etc. See the way each piece works. Take it apart. He finds that this exercise helps students overcome their fears and gain the confidence that

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they can describe the functions of something that is initially alien, or even frightening.

Somehow I knew this wouldn't work. I could almost hear her eyeballs click when they rolled to the ceiling with *Give me a break!*

Or maybe I could expand on Dave's line: *Better to have one and not need it* . . . . But Phyllis was quick, she would hear right through the specious appeal. Availability makes things too irreversibly easy. And there is a difference between "wanting" and "needing." Only months after my mother died, my father was mugged, beaten badly, and the assailant's wealthy, well-connected uncle got him off with probation even though his priors were long and impressive. My father died only months later as a result, I believe, of both the mental trauma of my mother's death and the physical trauma of having been beaten up at age seventy-two. Until the assault, he had been healthy. The words *depressed* or *angry* don't begin to describe how I felt. This is perhaps the only time in my life I have ever really imagined myself killing somebody, actually planning how I'd do it. "Remember that old man you beat up?" I'd say when the guy was on the ground and bleeding. Then I'd draw it out, make him beg before wasting him. I had the motive and the cue for passion, but not the weapon, and I'm glad I didn't.

Phoenix. It's late, hot, airless. I take a break from writing this and find myself gassing up at a nearby Circle K. Tomorrow we plan to head up toward Flagstaff to beat the heat and hike in Oak Creek Canyon. I want to get out of Phoenix early. At the cash register, there is a guy with a cowboy hat who is smoking and talking to the clerk, a gaudy woman with orange hair who is also smoking. I give her my credit card and check out the guy's costume. Well-worn Wranglers, tall white hat, a silver buckle the size of a saucer, dusty boots. I wonder what rawhide hero helped him design himself? I'm thinking Steve McQueen in *Tom Horn.* The hat is right but the guy is not good-looking, has a narrow face and a mean rodent mouth that is really closer to Bruce Dern in *Hang 'em High.* But what's wrong with this picture? Then I realize he should be packing a Western-style Colt instead of the Glock .9 millimeter, an anachronism, riding high in a tooled leather holster on his hip.

My credit card is taking ages to go through. Nervous, I'd like to

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be out of here. In Phoenix anyone with an Arizona driver's license can tote a handgun as long as it's visible. The cowboy cranks up his Zippo and lights another cigarette.

In comes a dark-skinned teenager, a Mexican kid with hair that is sculpted, floppy on top with designs razored into the close-cropped sides of his head. His own costume is baggy hiphop. He's big and a bit sullen. He goes to the back of the store and takes his time in the party snacks.

The woman sighs and says, "This machine's been slow all day."

Leather creaks and I can see the cowboy has his hand resting on the Glock. He says, *sotto voce*, "Make my day." The woman snorts. Yellowish teeth peek from his smirk then slide back, covered by dry bluish lips.

The kid catches my eye and jerks his head, beckoning. I take a few steps down the aisle. He holds up two cans of cheese dip and asks me in a soft apologetic whisper which of these has the chillis. His buddies want the spicy, not the mild. He tries to laugh. For a second, I think he's putting me on, then realize he can't read. I tell him what he wants to know; and while I'm wondering if Bobby Purcell—the teen who killed the honors students—can read, the Mexican does one of those bouncy gang walks toward the clerk and the make-believe cowboy whose face is blank as a screen where some horrific footage could suddenly blaze to life.

When Phyllis decided to take advantage of a cut-rate airfare to visit her parents in Phoenix for a week, I was alone in the apartment with the gun. I tried to put it out of mind. Reading, writing, and grading papers held my attention for long periods of time. So did dreaming out the window at Mt. Timpanogos where I thought about taking a hike. But could I do that without the gun? Maybe I should fire it a few times to make sure it works. A small voice said *no*, told me I had better things to do. Finally I got it down from the shelf. I aimed at various things in the apartment. Then I stuck it in my belt and got belligerent with the bedroom mirror as Robert De Niro does in *Taxi Driver*. My improvised tough-guy monologue had me cracking up. Downstairs, I put the revolver on the kitchen counter, loaded the Mr. Coffee, and switched it on. While I was waiting, I spun ol' Smitty. If the barrel points at me, I told myself, I'll fire it. In five or six spins, the barrel never once pointed toward me. Finally, after a cup of coffee, I

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decided, as Oscar Wilde would have, that the best way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it.

I drove to a sporting goods store near the ZCMI mall on State Street. Which brand of shells do I buy? Winchester? Yes, the word had a ring to it and recalled a 1950s flick—Jimmy Stewart in maniacal pursuit of his heart's stolen beauty, a Winchester '73. It was a film of intense dramatic moments and lots of gunplay, but essentially bloodless—milk and cookies when measured against the high octane violence of today's films.

But the shells—do I buy one or two boxes of shells? Best be safe and get four.

I drove north on Interstate 15 past Spanish Forks to Lehi. Under the looming ramparts of Mt. Timpanogos, I turned west on Utah 73 for a half-hour or so, stopping here and there to collect drink cans from the side of the road. At Fairfield, where you can pick up the old Pony Express Trail, there is an historical site, The Stagecoach Inn. As I passed it, left the paved road, and rattled over a cattle guard, I thought of John Ford's *Stagecoach* and an early classic performance by John Wayne. A few minutes later, easing past white-faced cattle, I was Heston at the beginning of *Will Penny*, singing "Get Along Little Dogie."

I spotted four bald eagles sitting on a watering tank. As I drove further west, the land expanded in all directions, everything sharply defined in the clear light. East of the Dugway Proving Grounds (where some of the military's deadliest nerve agents have been tested), you could see for miles across the valley floor toward the Great Salt Desert, segments of the trail reappearing now and then as it snaked into the far distance. Not a soul in sight. No cloud of moving dust that might indicate another car. I told myself: you *need* a gun to protect you from all this nothingness. It was some seventy miles or so to Fish Springs, a bird refuge, but I knew I wasn't going that far. Not today. Save it for a trip with Phyllis.

Smitty lay on the seat beside me and was getting antsy to exit his holster and have some fun. I told him to be patient. I didn't want some rancher investigating gunshots. The dirt trail was badly rutted, washed out in a few places. I drove down into a dry creek

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bed at one point and without four-wheel drive, I'd probably still be there. The windows were down and I could smell the clean scent of sage.

I got out and rested Smitty on the fender while I divided the first box of ammo into different pockets. I set a line of cans at the top of a dirt embankment. A friend once told me a .38 snub nose was only good for shootouts between two guys in a phone booth. Funny, but not accurate. If you knew what you were doing, you could still hit something from, say, thirty feet, or farther.

I wasn't about to buy shooting range earmuffs and brought along instead the plugs I used for swimming laps in the university pool. At first I fired fast and didn't hit a thing. Same the second time around. For a minute, I thought I was firing blanks. While reloading, I heard Slim Pickens as Lon, the sadistic deputy in *One Eyed Jacks*, try to bluff Brando who is aiming a derringer at him: "You ain't about to take *my* neck off with that little ol' popper. You lucky you hit the wall."

I took aim the third time and said, "Is that so, Lon?" This time I hit two cans. On the next reload, I hit three. After a while, the cans were pretty well ventilated and I looked for other targets. I remembered *Shane*, the famous teach-me-how-to-shoot scene where little Bobby points to a small white rock and Shane makes it jump about. Fortunately there happened to be a white rock handy, so I started blasting away, trying to do the same. Poor Smitty made unconvincing *pops* compared to the potent roar of Shane's big six gun. In between reloads, while the silence regathered and my ears stopped ringing, I entertained myself by doing Alan Ladd as I sometimes would at a party. Like my mother, Bobby's mother hated guns, and Shane had to set her straight: "Marion, a gun is just a tool, no better or worse than any other tool. . . . A gun's as good or as bad as the man using it." I could almost see him as an N.R.A. poster boy delivering the old bumper sticker line: "If guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns."

I was laughing and having a good time for myself, a kid again, but I kept looking around guiltily to see if somebody might be watching. There was nothing but unfillable silence, knee-high sage and low clumps of dark green juniper that dotted the reddish land as it rose and fell to distance. I

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spilled the warm shells into my hand. The smell of brass and black powder was like a Proustian madeleine and took me back.

One October day, my friend Nelson and I decided to skip school to hunt for ringnecks. When I arrived at Nelson's house, his mother was making breakfast for his two younger brothers. The smell of frying bacon was wonderful when I stepped in the back door out of the cold. I spoke briefly to his mother and took the stairway just off the kitchen that led upstairs to his room. Bobby, another friend, was already there. Nelson was pulling on boots, and his 16 gauge Savage lay across the bed. Bobby, someone we were always trying to get rid of, picked up the gun and aimed it at me: "Go ahead, make one false move."

Nelson grabbed the gun from Bobby and said, "Let's go."

Bobby said, "Man, I wish I could go with you guys but I got too many cuts. Mr. Flannagan makes one more phone call and I'm dead."

I went down first, said good-bye to Mrs. Cone, and stepped outside. I stood in the sharp autumn air, waiting, wondering what the holdup was when I heard a great muffled *boom.* Reflexively, I turned from the house. BBs, glass, and bits of wood rained against my hunting jacket. When I turned back, I saw a hole the size of a garbage can lid. The window mullions were gone and long reddish curtains hung from the blown-out frame like viscera. There was an unforgettable scream, the kind that stripped varnish from the soul, followed by a long silence. Then: "Oh God, Oh Sweet Jesus!"

Mrs. Cone's terrified prayer was answered because nobody was injured, or almost. Nelson's younger brother, Lee, broke a filling in his tooth when he got back to finishing his scrambled eggs, where a pellet had landed and hidden itself.

Nelson had foolishly loaded the shotgun in his room, even though we had been instructed never to do such things in the safety course we were required to take in order to get hunting licenses. When the gun discharged on the stairs, Bobby was only three feet in front of Nelson. Had the barrel moved six or eight inches one way or another on that narrow stairwell, Bobby would

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have been cut in half. In the hallway, the acrid smell of cordite was overwhelming.

The only time I ever carried Smitty was when Phyllis and I went out to some remote place for a hike. My usual procedure was to do a transfer from the closet shelf to the floor under the driver's seat while Phyllis was in the apartment busy with something else. When we arrived at the trailhead for our hike, I'd let Phyllis get out of the car first, then I'd reach the revolver from under the seat and clip the holster at the small of my back between my waistband and undershirt. Emerging from the Jeep, I let my shirt or jacket cover it the way Don Johnson always did in "Miami Vice."

I'd gone through this routine many times: near Vernal, up in the Uintas, at Canyonlands, Moab, and other places. Often I'd forget I was packing, until I'd sit down for lunch, or lean against a rock and feel Smitty hard against my back. Phyllis and I had good times in these places, looking at birds, hawks, and eagles. Once we saw a bear in the distance, but never a cougar, though we did see paw prints in an arroyo once, after a storm, the prints still filling with water.

The year was almost over. One last trip took us down to Price, past the rusty remains of an old mining operation, and into the rugged terrain of Nine Mile Canyon (really closer to forty miles) where one of my students told me we would find extraordinary rock art from the Fremonts, an early native people who, according to archaeologists, were absorbed by the Anasazi when they abruptly and mysteriously left the canyon 900–1000 years ago.

We were among some shady cottonwoods next to the cliffs, looking at a sandstone petroglyph, a perfect panel which depicts hunters with bows and arrows sneaking up on a herd of mule deer. (I'm told that this priceless and unprotectable art has since been shotgunned away, irretrievably gone.) We were glad we had made the trip and taken the trouble to find such a remote place. Deeply silent. No alien sounds. It was mating season, and lots of deer were about. Six or eight foraged on the trail less than a hundred yards from us. The same deer hunted by the Fremonts. A sense of timelessness. It was the kind of magic place that prompts the imagination. You see things.

Four scruffy dogs came through a clearing to our left. The deer bolted. Their hooves clacked on sandstone. The dogs, seeing

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easier meat, slowed and changed direction. They were shaggy, more like wolves. A huge black male seemed to be the leader. Yellowish eyes. Two other dogs were brown with thick tails, another black and white. They were ranch dogs gone feral. They came toward us at a lope and spread out, going for position, as they did with deer. I pulled Phyllis into a shallow stone alcove to have our backs covered just as they started to bark, but the barking quickly gave way to snarling. The black dog's ears went back. He growled and showed his teeth, which stood out impressively against his black face and red tongue.

Out came Smitty. *Pop, pop, pop.* An incredible rush. When the dirt jumped up only a few feet from his face, Blackie vanished like the fantasy he was. The deer never bolted. The dogs were never there but that never-never-land footage had stuttered to life because I wanted it, wanted a situation where I could deepen my voice in an actorish way and say to an outraged Phyllis, "Would you rather they had us for lunch?" Or, after some back and forth, I'd deliver the argumentative kill shot and say, "Better to have one and not need it, than to need one and not have it."

Smitty fortunately never made an appearance during any of our hikes that year, but when I carried the gun, I felt myself altered somewhat. I didn't walk or talk like John Wayne, but I imagined and projected, nay, even vaguely longed for something that would justify all the guilty subterfuge, a situation that would bring back and make real those anti-historical counterworlds where I had spent so many hours. I wanted problems to disappear with the ease of a squeezed trigger. When I first hefted the revolver in Paul's office, the old wires twitched. These wires stretch back through adolescence to the Paleolithic caves. These wires mean money now, big money, and they are kept well insulated by Hollywood. They run as deep as resistance to change.

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CHARLES MARTIN AND JOHANNA KELLER

# Five Poems from the French of Christine de Pisan

*Famous in her day as the first woman in the Western literary tradition to make her living as a writer, Christine de Pisan (1364–1430) composed, in the misogynistic milieu of late medieval France, a body of work that constitutes the first feminist defense of the character of women. Christine, a prolific poet, was instrumental in the development of the* ballade, *the* rondeau, *and the* virelay, *and adapted these forms to write of her own personal experiences and on such subjects as courtly love, contemporary politics, and the intellectual issues of her time. The daughter of the astrologer to the court of Charles V, Christine was married at the age of fifteen and widowed at twenty-five. To support her three children, she turned to writing. The first three poems reflect on her happiness in marriage and her grief as a widow; the fourth and fifth offer two views of women in the often compromising situations of courtly love.*

## 1 Doulce chose est que mariage . . .

That marriage is a sweet delight
For one whose husband's good and wise,
My married life will demonstrate,
As God has made me realize.
Praise Him who made this man my prize,
His goodness I am swift to tell,
And know of my own expertise,
*Surely my sweetheart loves me well.*

I learned his goodness on the night
That we were wed and with great ease
Can prove it, for, from dusk to light,
He offered me no injuries;

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Before time came for us to rise,
A hundred kisses I recall
He gave, but took no liberties;
*Surely my sweetheart loves me well.*

His language, courtly and polite,
Assured me: "I was born to please
You, darling—I am yours by right,
To serve you well, as God decrees."
And lest the dream he wove should cease,
He'd tell me this and this retell
All night, unswerving from his course:
*Surely my sweetheart loves me well.*

Princes, I'm mad with some disease,
For when he says he's mine, I swell
To bursting with Love's ecstacies;
*Surely my sweetheart loves me well.*

## 2 Je suis vesve, seulete, et noir vestue . . .

I am alone, a widow, garbed in black,
My visage sad, and drably am I dressed,
Stricken with grief and terribly distressed,
For I bear bitter mourning on my back.

And it is right for me to be depressed,
Whose woes are more by tears than words expressed;
I am alone, a widow, garbed in black.

Since I lost him whose memory brings back
The misery that's mine, I've been oppressed;
Gone are the days and joys that I loved best,
And Fortune's wheel has now become my rack;
I am alone, a widow, garbed in black.

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## 3 Seulete suis, et seulete vueil estre . . .

Alone am I and wish to be alone,
Alone am I my love has gone away,
Alone am I and master have I none,
Alone am I with none to share my way,
Alone am I in languor and dismay,
Alone am I in utter poverty,
Alone am I *no lover lives with me.*

Alone am I at door or windowpane,
Alone am I in corner hideaway,
Alone am I with tears to feed upon,
Alone am I in grief or grief at bay,
Alone am I my pleasure so to stay,
Alone am I my chamber's company,
Alone am I *no lover lives with me.*

Alone am I in every place I've known,
Alone am I where I abide or stray,
Alone am I more so than anyone,
Alone am I to all a castaway,
Alone am I abased by everyone,
Alone am I in tears most frequently,
Alone am I *no lover lives with me.*

O princes, now my sorrow has its sway,
Alone am I of every grief the prey,
Alone am I as dark as mulberry,
Alone am I *no lover lives with me.*

## 4 Sage seroit qui se saroit garder . . .

Wise would she be, who keeps her own good name
From those deceiving lovers who would wage
War on her reputation as a game:

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Groaning, they overdo the amorous rage
That has them pent like finches in a cage,
And go about playacting, wan and pale—
But I endite this plainly on my page:
*Who most complain are not those who most ail.*

Listen to this one's oaths, to that one's claim
That he's the slave of Love and not his page!
Whoever saw these gawkers without shame
Telling such tales to women as they gauge
Will best deceive them—if that man were sage,
He would correct these lovers without fail.
Confine such overacting to the stage:
*Who most complain are not those who most ail.*

To mend such lovers surely is God's aim,
For much harm comes from men who will engage
Women with pleas for favors, who defame
Their honesty, who beg them to assuage
Those passions which they feigningly allege;
For my ballade (when asked) will tell this tale:
No matter noble birth or lineage,
*Who most complain are not those who most ail.*

## 5 Tant avez fait par vostre grant doulçour . . .

By the great sweetness that your deeds reveal,
My sweetest lover, you have conquered me;
I'll make no further protest or appeal;
Resistance is in vain, I plainly see.
Love wishes this by his sweet mastery,
And I, so may God help me, wish it too,
Considering what folly it would be
*To spurn a lover who's as kind as you.*

And I have hopes to find in you the steel
Of valor, that will set in constancy
The love for you that in my heart I feel;

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But as for beauty, grace, integrity,
Of these you have a great sufficiency;
And as you're certainly more than my due,
I am convinced it would be wrong of me
*To spurn a lover who's as kind as you.*

If you will serve me in a courtly style,
My fine sweetheart, I pray no falsity
Be found in you, nor any other guile;
So taken with you that you've taken me
By your sweet manner, your serenity,
And your sweet eyes, so amorously blue;
It would be my great fault, entirely,
*To spurn a lover who's as kind as you.*

Sweet lover, whom I cherish utterly,
Whose praises I sing ever and anew,
Reason would think it most unwise of me
*To spurn a lover who's as kind as you.*

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GEORGE WATSON

# The Magus of the North: Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909–97)

Greek Orthodox or Armenian?" The voice of Isaiah Berlin, when I told him I had been to Istanbul to meet the patriarch, was soft and challenging; and it showed what the rest of the evening would be like, which it was. That was in Oxford in 1952. It was a perfectly fair question, and a friendly one, but its speed floored me, and for the next forty years and more I was content mainly to listen. That suited us both. I have always been good at listening, though not always good at showing it, and Berlin was above everything a voice.

His appearance mattered rather little. Someone once said he looked like a Russian clown with the eyes of a headmaster, but you used your ears rather than your eyes when you were with him, and the title of his book, *The Magus of the North* (1993), might have been meant for himself, since a magus (or mage) is a wise man who comes from afar. The word has a hint of the magician about it, too, as he did. When he died in November 1997, aged eighty-eight, the first thought was that one would never hear the sound of him again.

That, happily, is not strictly true. So much has survived in recording, including whole lectures, that the world might still listen if it chose, and it probably will. No need, then, to say much about the legendary rapidity of his delivery, which was praeternatural, like an academic version of Noël Coward—forcefully staccato but uninterrupted by any need to take breath, apparently, since he talked while breathing in as well as out. No need to describe his accent, either, which was less foreign than wildly idiosyncratic; and no need to speak of his instant rejoinders, like asking which patriarch, since they are the stuff of a thousand anecdotes. His talk was internationally famous. He was the champion. At dinner in a Cambridge college he was once carefully seated beside Richard Braithwaite, a philosopher locally

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credited with the ability to outtalk anyone. Both rose to the challenge, talking rapidly at the same time, till after some minutes Braithwaite's voice faltered to a halt. The Oxford visitor triumphed over him and then turned to address his neighbor on the other side.

Berlin's memory, too, was vast in several languages, and he could cap any quotation. When an affliction of the vocal chords diminished his volume in the 1980s, though not his speed, he remarked sadly that the doctors had found no cure for it, so I cheerfully quoted Hilaire Belloc:

They answered as they took their fees,

and he instantly completed the couplet:

There is no cure for this disease.

He did it with a good-natured air, as always. But, as always, he had had the last word. You never got the edge.

Fast talk was the Oxford style in postwar years, if not earlier, and Berlin was its most eminent exponent for a good half century. He was the fastest tongue in the West, and in a wide variety of languages. Born in Riga in 1909, in Tsarist Latvia, where his father was a timber-merchant of some affluence, and brought up in St. Petersburg, or Petrograd, where his Jewish family withdrew as the German imperial army advanced in 1915, he commonly spoke Russian and German as a boy. His mother was a woman of musical interests, at once a good soprano and an excellent manager of family affairs. Leonard Schapiro, another Latvian and eventually, as a London professor, the historian of the Bolshevik party, belonged to a similar family that had made a similar move, and he used to speak of Mrs. Berlin as almost a mother to himself. Together as small boys in Petrograd they watched two revolutions in 1917, their families greeting the first with delight, when Kerensky overthrew the Tsar in February and set up a provisional government. Lenin's revolution nine months later drove them to England, where Isaiah arrived in his twelfth year speaking only a few words of English. A fellow-schoolboy in London, he used to tell, tried to bully him, misled by his name into thinking him

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German, but the other boys prevented it. Then Oxford, his home for almost seventy years, where after 1932 he taught first philosophy and then intellectual history, with a Fellowship at All Souls, marrying a Frenchwoman in his late forties.

Oxford was his lifelong theatre. He greatly preferred it to Cambridge, which he found remote and unworldly, in spite of lying at much the same distance from London. In the early summer of 1940, he used to claim, he had read a paper there as France fell. Oxford was agog with the tragic news; Cambridge, so he would say, had not even heard of it. Perhaps he allowed too little to the natural reticence of the place; at all events, he visited it infrequently. The last time I saw him there was November 1984, when he came to hear his friend Alfred Brendel, a pianist he greatly admired, lecturing on "Does Classical Music Have to Be Extremely Serious?," delivered with illustrations from the piano. Composed in Berlin's summer home in Italy, the lecture was mainly concerned with musical jokes in Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and Berlin enjoyed it hugely. But he had earlier declined to look at a portrait I had there of Michael Speransky, an enlightened prime minister of Russia during the Napoleonic wars and a character in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*—an oil painting I had no room for. The story, however, had a happy ending. He urged me to put it into a London auction-room, saw it there on a visit while looking for something else, liked it and bought it. I remain wholly convinced that it suited his collection better than mine.

His aptitudes were various and prodigious, and seemingly cost him no effort. He was not a hard-working man, he would say, but essentially pleasure-loving, was never top of his class at school and never learned Latin or Greek, beyond a little, though he seemed to speak and read all the great modern languages of Europe, not to mention (one may perhaps assume) Latvian—no doubt with the same eccentricity with which he spoke English. Leonard Schapiro used to say he was the same at eight as at eighty, which is hard to believe. He meant that all his life he was plump, many-sided in his interests, and voluble. When Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* appeared in English in 1958, to immense acclaim, I remember Berlin remarking casually that the Italian version was better. But then he had known Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova in Moscow in 1945; in fact she addressed poems to him. He was seemingly indifferent to food, wine and scenery. As for music, he

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adored it, but though he often said Bach was the greatest composer that had ever lived, his after-dinner records were more often Rossini, Verdi and Puccini. Schubert held a deep place in his affections. If he had not thought romanticism so variously and inconsistently defined as to be in some danger of becoming an incoherent and nebulous concept—it was a topic on which he wrote and lectured a lot in his last years—one might have dared to call him a romantic. Perhaps one should call him that in any case.

His acquaintance was vast. He appeared to know everyone, whether in academia, in politics or in the arts, and they him. During the war, as he loved to tell, Winston Churchill, who had admired his dispatches from the British embassy in Washington, addressed a series of solemn questions to Irving Berlin over lunch at Ten Downing Street in the spring of 1944, under a natural misapprehension—"Will President Roosevelt be re-elected, do you think?" and "When do you expect the European war to end?"—and stumped off indignantly when the songwriter told him how proud he would be to tell his children, when he returned to New York, that the prime minister of Great Britain had asked him such questions. By his thirties he was so famous that you could think he was there even when he was not.

He adored meeting celebrities, but seemed to delight in all manner of company, perhaps because he greatly preferred talking to writing. Like many authors, he hated his desk. The honors that flowed upon him—international prizes, honorary doctorates, a knighthood, the Order of Merit and the presidency of the British Academy—were all joyous events, as honors should be. He was as famous in the United States and in Israel as at home; and when he turned eighty, in June 1989, there was a public celebration attended by the great and the good, its guest of honor enjoying the occasion unashamedly and as much as anyone.

He loved England, where he had chosen out of all the world to live, as the most civilized and tolerant of societies—"fundamentally liberal and unsqualid"—with different people, he would say, pursuing different ideals in different ways, as if to illustrate his own rootedly pluralistic vision of virtue, and "left to go wrong in their own ways, provided they do not obstruct others." That, as long ago as the 1720s, had been the vision of another famous continental refugee called Voltaire, and Berlin had something in

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common with him. A latter-day Enlightenment man, he wrote and lectured amusingly and endlessly on freedom—a sort of Voltaire of the jet age—and his love of England was fully returned. He was a Voltaire who did not go home.

His name rang out, on both sides of the Atlantic, above all as a lecturer, and always before enormous audiences. No hall was big enough. His style was tense and incandescent, at once nervous and supremely confident. Speaking from notes he had carefully boiled down from forty pages to ten, then to three, and finally to a mere page of headlines to pull him through, he would fix his eyes obsessively on the upper right-hand corner of the ceiling and talk at high speed for about an hour like a Niagara unleashed. His nervosity was infectious, and it left both him and his audience in a state of high excitement. "Was I all right?" he once asked me after a lecture, and I assured him that he was. "When I am about to lecture I tell myself: I must be calm, I must be tranquil, I must control myself—but it's no use." The double repetition was characteristic of his diction, as if he had absorbed Lewis Carroll's adage "What I tell you three times is true." One repetition, somehow, would not do. It was too weak. Of an erring colleague he once remarked, in his defense: "He is benevolent, benevolent, benevolent."

What audiences heard, and knew that they had heard, was the voice of Europe.

Perhaps the tradition of the European intellectual refugee in Britain is worth a moment's pause, since it is a land with an unearned reputation for insularity. That is no doubt because it is an island. It is an extremely hospitable island, however, as Karl Marx discovered in 1849, and three years later Alexander Herzen, the Russian revolutionary Berlin most deeply admired. As Sigmund Freud illustrated years later, in 1938, England is where many of the great innovative thinkers come to work and to die. The effects upon their chosen land are profound. Lenin's seizure of power, and later Hitler's, spilled many thousands of them on the British shore, and by the 1940s the intellectual influence of Central and Eastern Europe on London literary life, and on academia, had largely replaced the traditional fascination of France. Art historians brought Aby Warburg's library from Hamburg to London and transformed the study of Renaissance art;

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Wittgenstein and Popper reshaped British philosophy; Arthur Koestler, a Hungarian ex-Communist fresh from a Franco prison in Spain, landed around the beginning of the Second World War and was befriended by George Orwell, who had recently fought in a civil war there. Freud, already a dying man, joined his daughter Anna in London after the Anschluss in 1938, bringing possessions from Vienna as well as a tradition, including a famous sofa. Totalitarian persecution—first Bolshevik, then Nazi, then Francoist—was by then the common talk of the British press and the British literary world; and when Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* appeared in 1949, a few years after the liberation of Hitler's death-camps, the stark tragedy of the European experiment in total state power was no abstraction. It had been lived for years by people one knew, by friends made, by stories heard.

Berlin himself, whose two grandfathers had been murdered by the Nazis, did not readily speak of such matters, and they form almost no part of his writings except by implication. To mention the Holocaust in his hearing, or the Soviet camp system that preceded it and served as its model, was to sense a moment of embarrassment and a call for a quick change of subject. The reasons are likely to have been various. His sensibilities were in any case delicate, and his abundant sense of fun masked, one might reasonably guess, an acute vulnerability. He was one of the funniest of men, but the fun was not there for fun, or not only for that, and those who exploited the most terrible events of the century to titillate their readers and their audiences must have shocked him, though I never heard him say so.

One seldom, then, asked his views of such issues; and to do so was usually to be told that there were others who knew better. That was often so. Though vastly well read he was not, in the strictest sense of the word, a scholar, in pretension or in fact. He was a savant, a type that the inexorable march of specialist scholarship had already by the 1930s rendered an endangered species and which has since become all but extinct. Perhaps Lionel Trilling is the nearest American equivalent. His passion was for general ideas rather than for specificities, and he was inclined to lose interest in what he had written after drafting and dictating it—mislaying it in a bottom drawer, perhaps—and was certainly disinclined to equip it with footnotes; and he read books rather than learned articles. When I examined the long and

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neglected socialist tradition of racism and genocide in *Politics and Literature* (1977), for example, he was surprised by what I had found in early Marxist journalism—"I had no idea Marx and Engels went as far as that," he remarked, candidly accepting that he had not read them through—and when, while writing *The Idea of Liberalism* (1985), I asked his view of Hitler's probable debt to Marxism and its exterminatory traditions, he implied some distaste for the whole enterprise. The mind of a mere thug was unworthy, he very likely felt, of such analysis. It is a sentiment to be understood, and one that has largely protected National Socialism, for over half a century, from the searching eye of the intellectual historian. Marx's contribution to Nazism is not an attractive topic, and it is no wonder if the easy assumption that racism is largely or wholly right-wing continues, unexamined, to flourish.

Large events, in any case, like revolutions and massacres, were hardly his hunting-ground. He preferred anecdotes. His forte was for general ideas excitedly but skeptically considered. He did not believe in much among the world's great dogmas. His older contemporary E.M. Forster, another troubled figure of the late Enlightenment, once famously wrote that he did not believe in belief—meaning, as Berlin might have meant if he had made the remark, that he distrusted absolute dogmas like immutable laws of history. It was the prime task of his life to expose and demolish such dogmas, and he went about it with a vengeance. The twentieth century, starting out with high promise, had wilfully wrecked itself by surrendering to the fallacies of small bands of shallow thinkers owing a thoughtless and irrational allegiance to nineteenth-century theorists—Anarchists, Positivists, Marxists, Nietzscheans—whom their own age had, on the whole, sensibly disregarded or, at most, seen as no more than a passing diversion. The bedsitter revolutionary of one age can so easily become the butcher of the next. But the mind of Europe, he believed, if summoned in due time—the enlightened mind of Diderot, of Kant and of Goethe—can still expose the fallacies of murderous sages who had strenuously tried to block the road between the Enlightenment and us.

That claim came to look stronger as he aged. The emergence of the late 1960s New Left, an obscenity too extravagant to mock,

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showed that there was some urgency, after all, in what he had to say; and his defense of negative liberty, as he called it—freedom from rather than freedom to—which had been the theme of his *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958), looked more urgent than ever in the age of the Cold War, when an intelligentsia reared on tolerance, and sustained by state funds, chanted the names of foreign dictators under the generous protection of liberal states.

It is seldom easy, as he knew, to be skeptical without cynicism, for long, and perhaps cynicism did touch his middle and later years. Or was it just a part of his fundamental good humor? Derision, at all events, was a principal element in his rhetoric, and his seminar on Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the Oxford of the 1950s, as I remember, was a diverting diatribe against anyone who thinks he understands the laws of history—any laws, as he believed, beyond the merely truistic. Though his passion was all for general ideas, it was a passion where fascination mingled easily with contempt. Perhaps that was inevitable. In the realm of modern controversy, at least, most general ideas are incomplete or downright false, many of them dangerously so, and the spirit of negation haunts all critical enterprise. Berlin was too genial to be unreservedly called a cynic, and he heartily enjoyed the clash of ideas. But like Karl Popper, he thought most fashionable dogmas bunk, and dangerous bunk at that. The surge of derisive anecdotes was a constant entertainment to his listeners; it was also, by implication, an act of dismissal. If critics cannot agree on what romanticism is, there is not much use to the concept. Specific questions may have their answers, but those who imagine they have found a single answer to the totality of the human condition, like sexual repression or the class war, had better be off. Necessity, as a wit once remarked, is the invention of mother. It is an epigram he would have enjoyed.

His secular liberalism, impregnable as it was, grew more conservative with the years without ever quite losing itself in conservatism. That, after all, is the classic position of the refugee intellectual, as the years pass, and it is to be respected as well as understood. He knew the deep perils of triumphant ideology, and behind the demo he heard the cannon and the gun.

His great gift was for fiery exposition, and even the dullest of authors, stylistically speaking, like Kant's anti-Enlightenment ad-

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versary J.G. Hamann—an author whom even the most persevering of German researchers might find all but impenetrable—could turn to magic in his hands. "Long as your sentences are," an American visitor to Oxford once told him, in a compliment he rightly cherished, "they always seem short." The very survival of his last book, *The Magus of the North* (1993), to tell the truth, was miraculous, since Berlin had lectured on Hamann at Columbia as long ago as 1965 and had long since been convinced that his notes were lost. Their rediscovery by his devoted editor Henry Hardy must have seemed wonderful to him, since he often reproached himself for his indolence—by which he meant no more than that he preferred reading and conversation to authorship, especially to authorship at any length. He had scarcely written a book at all since *Karl Marx* in 1939, composed in his late twenties, his natural form being the single lecture and the long, roomy essay like his studies of Tolstoy, Vico and Herder. The *Magus* is a very short book, to be sure. But it is a book. It is also a little masterpiece. Incomplete as a draft but completed, with great editorial ingenuity, from readings in the author's voice, some of them fragmentary, it is that improbable voice that you hear as you read. Characteristically generous of Berlin to give so ample an account of the intellectual enemy he called irrationalism, which Hamann exemplified, and the device works. The Enlightenment never looked more majestic than in the hands of one of its most dedicated adversaries. Along with a succession of Berlin's collected essays, all widely reviewed and read, and culminating in *The Proper Study of Mankind* (1997), the book guaranteed to him in old age a perpetuity of repute.

"I am like a taxi," he would say, to excuse the lack of a great work, "and I have to be hailed." Perhaps he found it hard to believe that the essay, as a philosophical form, is better as well as easier than a book. It encourages economy; and if grand theory is interesting rather than true, then the point is best made briefly, again and again and against many targets. His writings look well designed for an age of theory-credulity, for a century almost destroyed by rash Isms. There has never been an age like it, after all, in its disposition to take on and cast off general answers with such rapidity, and it ends with an intelligentsia shamed, as it should be, by its own infinite gullibility. Berlin was the great

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demolisher of Isms, whether in politics or critical theory. He was a skeptic even of skepticism.

The utopian fallacies he fought were the property of aspiring intellectuals, on the whole, not of professional philosophers, and his name will in all likelihood live as a polemicist rather than as an original philosopher. One analytical philosopher, resolutely unimpressed by his lectures, once candidly told me they left him as unsatisfied as a Chinese lunch, and his memory survives as a great original rather than as one who was greatly original. As for his writings, they belong to a composite liberal tradition, at once continental and British, where a cosmopolitan grasp of original sources combines, almost uniquely, with a British love of laughter. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that many people became liberals by reading him or listening to him. His mind was too detached, early and late, to start a crusade or to join one. He thought the modern world, under the malign influence of misguided intellectuals, had gone wrong, but though he labored to expose their errors he did not think himself the man to put the world to rights. Action was not his thing, though he spent much of his middle years on committees and in 1967 became the first President of Wolfson College in Oxford—"one can do so much with a secretary"—and, it is said, a successful one. "I sit in a Victorian house in north Oxford all day long agonizing, agonizing, agonizing."

Meanwhile his doctrine of the fundamental incompatibility of human ideals, summed up in the title "The Crooked Timber of Humanity," a phrase borrowed from Kant, is a doctrine only important to the extent that it is doubted or denied, and few professional philosophers nowadays are likely to doubt or deny it. It is a message to fanatics and militants, and to accept it is to feel puzzled and vulnerable rather than defiant, wondering—as old militants often do—how one had ever been silly enough to think otherwise. When the hedgehog discovers for himself the poverty of theory, as the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson once did, he is left feeling defeated and sad.

By now the problem is different. "The fox knows many things," said an ancient Greek, in a fragment that gave Berlin his title for the 1953 essay on Tolstoy, "but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Tolstoy was a fox in his abundant sense of reality who had perversely wanted to be a hedgehog—to construct a single moral

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ideal out of the complex world he knew—dying, in the end, "a desperate old man, beyond human aid." That is a deathless image, like Lear on the heath. But to an age of multiculturalism and post-structuralism it has less to say. With the fading of Marx and Freud, and with the self-declared impotence of philosophers and critics to find a theoretical basis for agreed judgements in morality and the arts, advanced opinion turned foxy long before Berlin died. We are all foxes now. The fox has won, all the way, and anyone nowadays who claims in a seminar to have discovered the key to knowledge can expect, at best, a reaction of tolerant amusement. "Are you an absolutist?" The modern fox, moreover, is not (like Tolstoy) a tormented being. In fact he rejoices in his foxiness, in the lack of a single all-explaining answer, and would feel constrained at the thought that there could ever be one. Who wants to be a hedgehog now?

Berlin was one of the prime creators of that mood. Early and late he offered no drum to march to, no flag to fly. Contradiction is the essence of the human condition. "Values may easily clash within the breast of an individual," he told an audience in Turin opera house in 1988, on accepting the Agnelli Prize, "and it does not follow that, if they do, some must be true and others false." The search for perfection, he went on, is a recipe for bloodshed. Mankind cannot at once be just and merciful, since mercy and justice often conflict. No society can practice liberty and equality, since no one forced to be equal is free. In short, utopia is conceptually as well as practically impossible.

All that might leave one feeling there is nothing to be done, or at least that it is not clear that there is anything to be done. I do not suppose Berlin would have accepted that conclusion in just that form. The death of utopia still leaves choices to be made; you still have to choose which patriarch, Greek Orthodox or Armenian. When he died in Oxford in November 1997, the shock of the news was compounded with the sense that it was the first commonplace thing one had known him to have done. It was not like him to fall silent, or to be ordinary, or to leave without laughter.

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LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

# Wolf of the Skies

Half-avian,
half-human: vampiric
birds of prey who inhabit
a nethermost circle of Dante's
INFERNO—those shrewish female killer birds—
witness the Harpies! . . . Giant
high-fliers
of the dark forested
Americas, the largest eagles
in the world—
Harpies nest only in the tallest of trees,
trees with the widest upper limb
spreads: Silk-Cottonwoods
whose topmost

branches provide space for that five-foot-
diameter nest
expanse, which accommodates Harpy babes'
huge wing spans. Mama Harpies
go after small mammals, mostly: wild spider monkeys
and chimpanzees their favorite prey, to feed

the fledgling
chicks. Nesting on one egg
at a time, a single child brood—
they're a rarity, even among eagles
and the nobler hawks . . . The hunting mother
hides, amazingly, in thick patches
of fern-tree fronds,
or behind wide-leafed vines
that wrap around the trunks. Hardest
to conceal

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are those elongated turbanlike heads, necks
encircled by wide ruff of purply-
gray feathers that ripple
in wind chops,

puffed out in curly spirals . . . She's dubbed
the Flying Wolf
by Amerindian tribes of Guyana's interior,
who dread her rapacious
pounce. Cruising at high altitudes that test the limits
of human sight, she swoops, diving so fast we glimpse

a wing-folded
slender pointy-beaked blur.
A Harpy's been spotted picking off
two small monkeys at once, transversely
streaking across the upper branches of a tree
in a single parabolic arc:
one nestled
in her beak, the other
braced in talon's clutch—her aim
so precise
she hardly flicked a leaf or branch en route . . .
Often, she'll carry squealing charge
some twenty miles back
to her eyrie,

for quick deposit in gaping craw of her long-
pinioned gawky
newborn. And oddly harrowing it is to hear
distant shrieks of a captured
monkey, rabbit, possum or squirrel grow swiftly near
before you track the soaring Harpy's approach

as she cruises
overhead, nestward bent.
The panic in those cries raises
a listener's hackles like the siren
of a far-off ambulance, too suddenly looming

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close to home—followed by relief
of its darting
past, when it fades to shrill
whistle trailing off in the opposite
direction . . .
Whenever the natural wild game grows scarce
for nesting Harpies of the South
Kanuku Mountains, famished
eagles may drop

out of the skies without warning and snatch
human toddlers
from a family campsite at midday, ignoring
the howls, stomps and arm-wavings
of nearby parents. The abducted child, never saved
nor any but his scoured-clean bones recovered,

prompts instant
posse of best archers
to embark on eagle-search junkets.
That crew of huntsmen, by Tribal Oath,
are sworn to bring down the Wolf of the Skies
before they return home, hitting near-
impassable trails
for weeks or months. If need be,
they scout for telltale nests in highest
Silk-Cottonwoods.
Once the crownlike thick eyrie is ferreted out,
they hurriedly piece together vine-
woven sheets of foliage
for concealment,

dig burrows, and lay themselves out flat
under the cloaks—
stakeout's never too near the nesting tree
or a restless, squawky nursling
might tip off the homebound mother that their ambush
lurks close. Patience & soft breathing. Late or soon,

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swift huntress
carrying the fresh-caught
wriggly burden will glide down
to feed her hungry eaglet. Alighting
on the mammoth hive of nest, she may be caught
in nervous seesawing turnabouts
and swerves—rival
instincts battling it out
within her breast: fear of the too-close
faint man scent
and compulsion to drop grub into upturned beak.
The frantic monkey squirms & wails,
while her expectant offspring
below thrills

at the feeding prospect—its gullet
churning with croaks
and gurgles of pre-gorging. In that pause,
that odd to-and-fro hovering
of wary mother frozen in mid swoop—again and again—
above her nest, a whole throng of arrows seem to fly

at once, rising
from ten or more hidden
earth sites, the dugouts arranged
in a semicircle. A first shaft whizzes
harmlessly between tail feathers, second arrow
pierces mere wingtip, but fatal third
shot fired zings
through the lower neck arc
just above the breastbone . . . The scouts
soon recover
the fallen majesty drooped across her nest rim.
They must carry home the claws, severed
back to the wing-pinion joint . . .
proof of slaying.

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KERMIT MOYER

# Lycanthropy

**lycanthropy** (li kan′ thra pē) n. 1. A kind of insanity described by ancient writers in which the patient imagined himself to be a beast, and exhibited depraved appetites, etc., in accordance with this delusion. 2. The kind of witchcraft which was supposed to consist in the assumption by human beings of the form and nature of wolves.

That my parents had a sex life (or rather that they'd had sexual intercourse at least twice) was something I'd known in theory ever since I'd found out where babies came from and, even more disturbingly, how they were made. This information was gleefully conveyed to me in perhaps unnecessarily graphic terms by an older cousin of mine the summer we came back from Hawaii. I was barely seven years old at the time, and as soon as I realized what my cousin Gary was implying about my mother, I hit him in the stomach, knocking the wind out of him and thereby temporarily reducing his obnoxious truth-telling voice to little more than a squeak. The surprising violence of my reaction was no doubt triggered in part by the fact that, just moments before, my mother had compromised herself by standing up, albeit a little tipsily, kicking off her shoes, and alternately dipping and lifting her hips in a fluid back-and-forth motion that was more like a seesaw than a wiggle as—her arms extended in the air, first to one side and then to the other—she demonstrated the Hawaiian hula to my aunt Margaret and my uncle Harvey—Uncle Harvey whistling a tad too appreciatively (as was apparent from the disapproving tightness of my aunt Margaret's thin lips) and Gary sitting on the floor all the while staring up at my mother's jiggling bosom, his slobbery mouth agape with concentration.

I should say here that, objectively speaking, my mother was a remarkably attractive woman. She would have been in her early thirties then, narrow of waist and long of limb, her strawberry-blonde hair thick and naturally wavy with a shock of curls at her forehead in imitation of Rita Hayworth (who was her favorite

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movie star and whom, as even total strangers frequently pointed out to her, she closely resembled). Like Rita, she also had unusually large breasts for such a narrow frame (or should I say "ta-tas"? since that was the family euphemism for them, just as "Suzy" and "Jimmy" were the names by which, when necessary, we referred to my sister's and my respective genitalia). When I was in high school, I had to get used to hearing my friends call my mother "stacked," a descriptive term whose crudity made me wince but whose accuracy I couldn't deny. I'd just shrug and say, "She used to be a model," as if by thus legitimizing my mother's undeniable bombshell allure I could somehow defuse it. Throughout most of my adolescence, there were certain occasions when I simply would not allow myself to look at my mother—when she was wearing a swimming suit, say, or a particularly tight peach-colored sweater she was partial to, or what in the 1950s were called "toreador pants" (although I couldn't take my eyes off of Laura Petrie when she wore them on "The Dick Van Dyke Show"). I was also very finicky about her keeping the door closed when she was using the bathroom or getting dressed. The fact that she tended to run around the house in a half-slip and brassiere when she was getting ready to go out with my father to the officers' club or to a dinner party could send me through the ceiling. Feeling like my hair was on fire, I'd stare at the floor and groan, "Mother! You're not even dressed!" But she'd just give my shoulders a squeeze in passing (one brassiered ta-ta pressing into my arm as unmistakably as a branding iron) and say, "Oh, don't be such a fuddy-duddy. I'm your *mother* for goodness sake, not some stranger."

Which of course was precisely the problem, as it would have been totally impossible for me to explain.

My father, on the other hand, seemed to take a certain delighted pride in my mother's unself-conscious tendency toward self-display. He would chuckle and shake his head whenever she pulled another one of what he called her "little stunts"—like going to a Halloween party dressed as an A-bomb test on the Bikini Islands, her costume consisting of a blue body stocking meant to suggest the Pacific Ocean worn, presumably for modesty's sake, under a bikini, natch, the bikini bottom decorated with pictures of the Bikini Islands, the bikini bra designed to convert her breasts into the bulbous head of a mushroom cloud. My

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father's way of dealing with such outrageous exhibitions was to see my mother less as Rita Hayworth than as Lucy Ricardo, her sexiness effectively neutralized by her own special brand of innocent kookiness. Consequently, his typical attitude toward my mother was one of amused toleration, Ricky Ricardo-ish and patronizing, as if she were an adorable but not yet completely housebroken French poodle.

For his own part, my father was also a handsome man, although his looks provoked nothing like the attention my mother's did. As skinny as Jimmy Stewart, he also had Stewart's long open face as well as his boyish propensity to stutter when exasperated or embarrassed, both of which states came easily to him. He had developed a permanent tan while he was stationed in North Africa during the war, and he wore his fine dark-brown hair parted and combed to one side with just the hint of a wave, which tended to fall in a slant across his forehead. His smile was slightly lopsided and entirely disarming. Although he was ordinarily as self-effacing as my mother was self-assured, his shyness could vanish completely if he were sufficiently moved, a capacity for emotional metamorphosis I now recognize as simply the sign of an exceptionally passionate nature but which, the first time I saw it happen, was like finding out that, behind his boyish and familiar face, he was secretly some other person, a stranger I hadn't even known existed.

At the moment in question (also a point of metamorphosis in my own emotional history), we're in some little Podunk town in the sun-baked wilds of western Wyoming on our way cross-country from Portland, Oregon, to my mother's family enclave in Pennsylvania after our return from Okinawa. It's the summer of 1956. I'm just two months shy of my thirteenth birthday; one week before, I had heard Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" for the first time playing on the ship's P.A. system and it had felt like an erotic awakening. Our car is a brand-new Pontiac Bonneville with wide, scooped-out tail fins, factory-installed air-conditioning (a first), and a bug-screen prophetically fastened across its chrome grill like a road agent's bandana. My father bought the car in Portland the day after our ship docked. It's the latest (and it will be the last) in a series of Pontiacs that he's owned since before the war. My father is nothing if not a brand-name loyalist, a staunch believer not only in The American Way but in American adver-

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tising as well—and, even more than that, in the wise progressivism of the American consumer's preference for processed foods and wrinkle-free fabrics. Indeed, his profession depends upon such a faith since, as a captain in the Army Quartermaster Corps, his job is to keep the Post commissary's shelves stocked with the brand-name products that American soldiers and their families will want to buy. When we lived in Okinawa, he introduced the island to a new snack food consisting of crisp little curls of fried corn meal; they came in a vacuum-packed can back then, not in a paper bag, and they were called Fritos. Where American consumer goods are concerned, my father likes to think he's on the cutting edge; he has strong opinions on the issue of Heinz vs. Hunts, Birdseye vs. Green Giant, Coke vs. Pepsi.

Since the superiority of General Motors to Ford is one of the chief articles of his faith, it comes as a bitter disillusionment when, on the second day of our cross-country trip in our stylishly be-finned and air-conditioned Pontiac, the automatic transmission goes haywire. It seems that certain perforations necessary for the efficient flow of the fluid that makes the transmission work have come from the factory partially sealed. My father and I are in the little air-conditioned office of the green-and-white cinder-block garage where our Bonneville has been lifted into the air and more or less disemboweled. Outside, it's at least 100 degrees in the shade, an oven-like, air-scorching heat that makes ordinary breathing difficult. My father is on the phone for the second time today with the Portland Pontiac dealer who sold him the car in the first place. According to the dealer, a new transmission will take between a week and ten days to deliver, but my father has already explained that he doesn't have a week to spare, that his orders to report to his new post are what he calls "date specific." Now the dealer is evidently telling him that the best they can do in that case is to get us the necessary parts so the original transmission can be repaired.

"But I didn't buy a new car with a rebuilt transmission," my father is saying. "That's not what I paid for. And if you can have parts delivered out here in a couple, in a couple of days"—his voice starting to rise now—"then why in the hell can't you deliver a new transmission? Or a new car for that matter?" There's a pause, and then, "I can appreciate that, but . . . No . . . No, I know that, but you still . . . No, I did not agree to anything like . . . Yes,

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but . . . No, I know that—that's not what I'm trying to . . . ." The conversation, if you can call it that, continues like this for some time, and, all the while my father is trying to get a word in edgewise, I can feel his frustration growing, as if it were pushing against the inside of his skull like some monster determined to get out, pushing and pushing until finally it bursts through and he shouts, "Will you just please shut the fuck up and let me finish a goddamn sentence?"

I raise the worn copy of *Life* I'm ostensibly reading high enough to cover my face. The magazine's glossy pages have gone so soft from handling that I have to shake them upright, the way my father rattles the newspaper at the breakfast table. Although the tall leather-skinned owner of the garage and one of his tattooed mechanics are also in the little office, my father seems to have become oblivious to all of us. Peeking around the edge of the magazine, I see the owner and the mechanic exchange a smirking glance, and I cringe back into hiding.

"Listen, goddammit," he's shouting. "Enough! I said I'm willing to . . . yes, I did say that, but three or four days won't . . . Bullshit! Absolutely not! I'm not going to just roll over and let you screw me."

I've never seen my father lose his temper this way before, much less use this kind of language. Behind my magazine, watching the contorted shadow of his head bob up and down, I'm as stunned as if a widening crack had just opened up in the solid ground beneath my feet. My father has always been the famously easy-going and unflappable one, the one I've always counted on to be the balancing counterpoise to my mother's (and my own) emotional volatility. But now, right before my eyes, Dr. Jekyll is turning into Mr. Hyde.

"Okay, okay," he's saying now. "If that's the best you can do . . . and it better be tomorrow, because . . . hell yes, I understand . . . " He puts his hand over the receiver and says, "They'll have the necessary parts trucked out here from Cheyenne the first thing tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow's Sunday," the weathered owner says. Both men are wearing cowboy boots and faded blue jeans with oversized belt buckles that look like silver pretzels. The owner is holding a straw ten-gallon hat with a V-shaped groove in the crown that he

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meditatively traces with the edge of his hand. "That'll mean overtime," he says.

Glaring, my father turns back to the phone. "And you know that since tomorrow's Sunday, it'll mean overtime," he says. "Well, fuck that, that's your problem—if I'm willing to make do with a rebuilt transmission after . . . You're goddamn right I will—and that includes not only overtime but also food and lodging—" He pauses and then barks out a laugh. "Oh, I'll keep the receipts, all right, every fucking one of them—but what about our inconvenience? Who's going to pay for that?"

There's another pause, during which I can see the long shadow of his head angrily shaking back and forth. "That's what I thought," he finally says. "No. Believe me, that'll never happen. I wish I could say it's been a pleasure doing business with you, too. Okay, yes, you do that—" There's the sound of the receiver banging into its cradle, and then, "You goddamned motherfucker!"

It's the first time I've ever heard this word, and it reverberates like a tuning fork struck somewhere deep inside me, suffusing all my inner space with an echo I know will never end.

My mother and my sister Janet have been at the drugstore across the street during all this, but now—looking through the big plate-glass window with the backward printing that you have to reverse in order to read (McSWEENEY'S GARAGE)—I can see them coming back over. My mother is wearing shorts and a sleeveless scoop-necked top; Janet is wearing shorts, too, and a halter-top, but next to the vivid definition of my mother's striding figure, Janet's chubby body looks vaguely generalized and unformed. Inside the window, affixed to the glass with masking tape, is a transparent plastic sunshade that tints them both a monochromatic blue-green, as if the window is the wall of an aquarium and they're some exotic species of humanoid fish moving toward us through their own submerged, underwater medium.

"Well, I guess we'll be hanging around for another day at least," my father is saying, his familiar self seemingly back in place. "So we'll need to get some luggage out of the trunk of the car, and then if there's a taxi service, someone we can call, and a place to stay—"

The other two men are looking out the window, watching my mother and sister as they approach the garage, the one I take to

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be Mr. McSweeney fanning himself speculatively with the brim of his straw hat, the tattooed mechanic stroking the bristles of his mustache with his lower lip, his jaw jutting forward like a baboon's. The tattoos cover his forearms, and although I can see that they're red and blue and that they include coiling shapes, I can't tell if they're vines intertwining or copulating snakes, not without going up close and staring, which, despite my curiosity, is something I don't even consider doing.

Just before my mother and Janet reach the glass door to the office, Mr. McSweeney says, "Here's the missus now," as if we've all been wondering when she would show up. He pulls the door open on a bright flash of afternoon sunlight and makes a gallant sweeping motion with his hat to usher them into the room, which feels suddenly crowded. A puff of hot air enters along with them, as though they've been blown in by the torrid breath of some gigantic but invisible desert beast who is following right on their tails, although my mother shows not the least sign of alarm.

"It's hotter than Helen-in-high-heels out there," she says, drawing a hand across her forehead. This is one of her many sayings, some of which are familiar, some of which (like this one, which has the tattooed mechanic slapping his thigh) she seems to make up on the spot. "Janet thinks you could bake cookies on the sidewalk."

"I do not," Janet objects, wary of any imputation of childishness to her now that she's almost ten.

"They say it'll fry an egg," Mr. McSweeney says. "Here"—turning toward the blue-bottled water cooler in the corner—"let me get you a drink of ice water."

"My, wouldn't that be lovely?" my mother says, bestowing on him one of her patented smiles. "At least it's nice and cool in here." She pinches the yoke of her sleeveless top with both hands, lifts it away from her collarbone, and gives it a shake. "Whew!" she says. "Me for an ice-cube bath!" And then, turning in my direction, "How about you, Chester?"

I close the copy of *Life* on my finger, noticing as I do that there's a picture of Grace Kelly on the cover; she's wearing a diamond tiara, apparently having been transformed into a fairy-tale princess who has nothing to do now but live happily ever after. "Dad said maybe we could go to the movies," I say, counting on his support even though I still won't look in his direction.

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"It might be a good way to stay cool," he reasonably points out.

"Great," my mother says. "As long as it's not a shoot-'em-up. So I guess that means we'll be here for a while."

She takes a little cone-shaped paper cup from Mr. McSweeney, and as he fills another one for Janet, three big bubbles break the surface of the water with a series of rude noises. My mother immediately turns to the water cooler and, lifting her paper cup in the air as if it's a glass of champagne, says, "Well, here's looking at *you*, too."

We all laugh, but of course what we're all busy looking at is not the water cooler but my mother, as I have no doubt she knows. What I'm wondering, though, is how much she knows about the stranger inside my father.

We spend the afternoon in the air-conditioned twilight of the only movie house in town. The Saturday matinee is a double feature, beginning with *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy*—which, although it's in black-and-white and there are a lot of kids making noise and running up and down the aisles, turns out to be both funny and scary. We laugh and yell "Look out!" and forget all about our car troubles. The second feature is also a comedy, a Technicolor remake of *The Lady Eve* entitled *The Birds and the Bees*, with Mitzi Gaynor, David Niven, and George Gobel. Despite its title, the movie isn't really about sex *per se*, although there are plenty of innuendoes and double-entendres, most of which I get, although I'm careful to play dumb. Since I'm sitting right next to my mother, I also pretend to be uninterested—once, actually yawning—whenever Mitzi Gaynor shows off her legs or whenever she leans over, accidentally on purpose, to show George Gobel her cleavage.

We emerge from the flickering darkness of the movie theater into the flat desert sunlight. The heat still hasn't let up yet, so after dinner at The Wagon Wheel, a barbecue place Mr. McSweeney recommended, we head back to our motel to put on our swimming suits and cool off in the motel pool. Like the matinee and the barbecue dinner, this is also a special treat since motels with swimming pools were a rarity in those days. The motel is long and L-shaped, an arcade of adjoining rooms forming a single stucco facade painted to look like adobe with dark wooden ceiling beams that jut out from under the flat roof between units in

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imitation of a Southwestern hacienda. Revolving above the office is a lighted red-and-green sign that says Rancho De Lucks in rope-like script, the capital L so stylized that at first—disbelievingly but also unable to doubt the evidence of my own senses—I mistake it for an F. The words are surrounded by a neon lariat in the shape of a shamrock. Our room has a window air-conditioner that makes a racket but churns out the cool air, a TV set bolted to the wall (another special treat since there was no TV during our year in Okinawa), and two oversized beds, each equipped with "Magic Fingers" massage, although, like the TV, the "Magic Fingers" only work when you feed quarters into a little attached coin-slot mechanism. Outside, the swimming pool, with its turquoise water and underwater lights, glimmers like a gigantic jewel in the gathering dusk.

I go into the bathroom to change into my trunks while Janet and my mother change in the room and my father goes to fill a plastic bucket with ice for our drinks—Cokes for me and Janet, and rum and Coke, what they call "Cuba Libres," for him and my mom. They've already had a couple of beers at the restaurant, and, as my mother likes to say, they're feeling no pain. Through the bathroom door I can hear the snap of elastic and the sound of her and Janet giggling as they put on their suits.

When I'm ready to come out, I rap on the door and shout, "I'm coming out now!" but Janet screams, "No-o-o, not yet!" and my mother says, "Just a minute, Mr. Speedy, ladies need a little more time than gentlemen." I wait until Janet yells "Okay—all clear!" then open the door on the sight of my mother standing in front of the dresser mirror tucking her hair into her swimming cap, her white terry-cloth beach-robe hanging open so that it looks like all she's got on underneath is a black bra and panties, even though I know they're actually the top and bottom of her favorite bikini—which also happens to be the skimpiest one she owns. I'm just glad it's getting dark outside, because sometimes when she takes me by surprise this way I'm afraid I might embarrass myself by getting excited involuntarily. When she says, "Ooo-la-la, mademoiselle, zee leetle boys will want to eat you up!" at first I think she's talking to her own reflection in the mirror but then I see she's actually looking at Janet.

Janet has on a new purple-and-white polka-dot one-piece that cinches in her chubby waist much better than the usual two-piece

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suits she wears, and for the first time I catch a glimpse of what she'll look like when she gets older. She's a chubby little kid with a broad face, freckles across her nose, a mouth that's a little too wide, and chopped-off reddish-brown hair that's so thick she can hardly even comb it, but her eyes are deep-set enough to suggest the fashion-model cheekbones that will one day be hers, and her eyebrows are already as arched and as smoothly tapered at the ends as the brush strokes of a Zen calligrapher. I can see that before too long she's going to be a knockout, and I'm both pleased and irritated by the discovery—pleased because it means I won't have to be embarrassed by the way she looks, irritated because of the power this means will someday be hers.

I was hoping we'd have the pool to ourselves, but when I follow my mother and Janet outside, I can hear kids' voices and the sound of splashing water. My father is on his way back with the ice, and when he sees Janet and my mother he starts whistling "Ain't She Sweet?," actually singing the words when he comes to "*Just cast an eye in her die-rection / Oh, me, oh, my, ain't that purr-fection?*"—except he changes "her" to "their," and Janet laughs, obviously delighted to be included in this wolfish celebration of femininity. I quickly look away when my mother gives an exaggerated wiggle of her hips, but I can't keep from hearing my dad call out, "Don't heat up all that cool water now—save some for me."

I'm trying my best to distance myself from all three of them, going so far as to stop to clear an imaginary pebble from my zori so Mom and Janet will walk on ahead of me, when, as I'm straightening up, I hear some kid yell, "Cannonball!" There's a loud splash, and a girl's voice says, "God, Petey, when are you going to grow up?" The first voice, no doubt Petey's, shouts, "Hah!" He's sputtering with laughter. "You think you're so cool," he says, "just because you've got boobs!" And then the girl's voice again, barely audible, hissing, "Asshole!"

I stop in my tracks, wondering if I've really heard what I think I've heard. But yes, apparently so, because next comes my mother's sweet-sounding but unmistakably scolding voice. "Dear me!" she says, like my great-aunt Mary. "Such language! And me without my earplugs—"

"Oh!" the girl says, sounding surprised that they've been overheard. "I'm sorry, but he's just such a little brat sometimes—"

"Am not," Petey says.

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"Are too," she says back.

"That's all right," says my mother, "but let's at least try to *act* civilized, shall we?"

From where I'm standing, I can see two girls down at what appears to be the deep end of the pool, their elbows hitched over the pool's concrete lip as if they've been swimming laps and are just taking a breather. They look like they're around my own age, maybe a year or two older, and from the confident sound of their voices, they're probably cute, too, although their faces are obscured at the moment by the wavering web of shadow cast by the water's undulating surface. They're both wearing swimming caps as well, which gives them a certain generic, even alien quality that tends to dissolve distinctions so their heads look oddly interchangeable. Below the water's surface, I can see their long tan legs scissoring back and forth as languorously as eelgrass swaying in a tidal wash.

My mother chooses this moment to turn back to me and say, "Chester, honey, tell your father he'd better bring his own towel."

I wince at the sound of my ridiculous name and am totally unsurprised when the girls fall immediately into a fit of giggling. I've told my mother a million times that I want to be called "Chet," at least in public. Even "Chess" or "Chessie" would be better than "Chester," but she just doesn't seem to get it. In fact, she seems to reserve "Chester" specifically for public occasions.

The open area around the pool looks like a spotlighted stage, so it's a relief to turn around and head back to our room to deliver my mother's message. Over my shoulder, I can hear the sound of more splashing and then my mother and Janet ooh-ing and ahh-ing as they lower themselves into the water. "Oh, that feels divine," my mother is saying, "utterly divine." Janet calls out, "Chessie, come on in!" and I imagine the two teenage girls rolling their eyes and giggling some more at my nickname, which I have to admit sounds more like something you'd call a pet cat than a human being.

In another second I'm out of earshot, and when I'm just a few steps away from our room, the door swings open and my father comes backing out holding a tray with four plastic cups on it. He's wearing his baggy khaki trunks with blue trim, and there's hair not only on his chest but on his stomach and shoulders, too, the hair on his stomach arrowing down into the top of his trunks so

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that it's hard not to think of it joining up with his pubic hair down there.

"Mom says to bring your own towel," I tell him, my eyes sliding away from his eyes and then coming back again. "Want me to get you one?"

"Yeah—would you do that? I've got my hands sort of full." He lifts the tray unnecessarily by way of demonstration, and when he smiles his lopsided smile at me I'm convinced that I've been mistaken—he and that guy on the garage telephone couldn't possibly be one and the same person.

Inside the room, I can't help but notice my mother's bra and panties lying in a silky white puddle on the floor next to the dresser. I look immediately away, but only manage, as I do, to catch an unwanted glimpse of my own skinny shoulders and hairless chest in the dresser mirror as I pass by. I take another towel from a rack in the bathroom and stop for a minute to study my face in the mirror over the sink, concentrating on my hazel eyes, which I consider my best feature, and using my fingers to comb the limp brown hair that I've inherited from my father back off my forehead. My chin strikes me as a little weak, but at least I don't have any pimples yet. My main problem is that I'm as skinny as a scarecrow—that and the fact that I'm nearsighted and have been prescribed glasses that out of misplaced vanity I categorically refuse to wear. Just to be sure that my breath smells all right, I squeeze a dab of toothpaste onto my tongue and slosh it around with a mouthful of water before spitting it out. Then I cross my eyes and waggle my tongue at myself in the mirror, happy that at least I don't look *this* bad, a little trick that encourages me enough to head back out to the public gauntlet of the pool. And, anyway, I'm a good swimmer—once I get in the water, I always feel as skilled and sleek as an otter. When I'm swimming, the thought that other people might be watching gives me a thrill instead of the usual twinge of embarrassment.

Outside, the dusk has turned completely into night. The desert sky is vast, seeming to come all the way down to the ground at your feet. Stretching from one end of the sky to the other, the Milky Way is like a thick swath of chalk dust across a newly washed blackboard. It makes me think of a song on "Your Hit Parade" the year before we moved to Okinawa: "*The sky's a blackboard high above us, / If a shooting star goes by, / We'll use that star to write 'I love you'*

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*/ A thousand times across the sky.*" The idea of school combined with the idea of romance makes the palms of my hands ache with a familiar self-pity: when the summer's over, I'll be starting the eighth grade in yet another new school, where once again I'll be completely out of it.

Still, ever since I heard a certain song on the car radio our first day out of Portland, I've been thinking that all the moving around I've done in my life really has a kind of romantic edge to it. After all, I've just spent a year in Okinawa (The Far East!), and I went over and came back on a military troop carrier. Even before that, when I was a little kid, I lived in Hawaii, where going without shoes year round made the soles of my feet so tough I could run barefoot on gravel. It's no wonder that something in the melody of the song—and especially in the yearning voice of the heartbroken woman singer—made my chest swell: the wandering cowboy she was singing about, despite our superficial differences, might just as well have been me. Because, like him, I was also "*born the next of kin, / The next of kin to the Wa-ay-ward Wind.*" Humming the melody now, I summon a picture of myself walking up onto the porch of my mother's family summer cabin in Pennsylvania with all my cousins there as that same song plays on the porch radio like the soundtrack to my own personal movie.

I'm so lost in this fantasy that when I cross the decorative stretch of rocks and cactus that surrounds the wavery turquoise glow of the swimming pool and come out onto the pool's bright concrete apron, it's like coming out of a movie into daylight: I feel unmoored from time, molecularly dispersed and insubstantial. The first thing I'm aware of is Janet shouting, "Chessie, look at me!" She's crouched on my father's back, and as he rises up out of the water like some subaquatic Creature from the Black Lagoon, she straightens her knees and springs off his shoulders in an awkward but successful dive.

"Bravo, Janet!" my mother calls out. She's got her head propped up against the edge of the pool at the shallow end, and she's floating on her back with her arms stretched out along the pool's rim, her drink in one hand and her white shoulders gleaming.

The tray with the other drinks is on a small three-legged table directly behind her, and as I walk over to deposit my towels with the rest of our things, I'm trying to see out of the corner of my eye

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who else is here, carefully avoiding the risk of any direct eye contact at this stage. The two girls I noticed before have moved from the pool's deep end around to the same side of the pool my mother is on. They're close enough to her now that they might have even struck up a conversation already, which immediately gives me a queasy feeling since you never know what my mother is likely to say, especially when she's been drinking, something that during the past year I've noticed she's been doing a lot more of than she used to. Still, maybe she's been telling them how we've just come back to the States after a year in the Far East, and maybe even now they're regarding me as the world traveler that nobody can deny I actually am. Standing there holding the ends of the towel that I've got slung around my neck, I narrow my eyes with what I imagine is a world-weary, seen-it-all expression and gaze out at the broken line of the dark horizon.

"Chessie," my mother says over her shoulder, "Linda and Carolyn say those hills out there are full of real coyotes—sometimes at night, you can hear them howl."

"Usually it's when there's a full moon out," one of the girls says, "but not always."

"And werewolves!" Petey whispers confidentially. He's stretched out in the shallow water walking his hands along the bottom of the pool as if he were swimming. "They'll suck out your blood!"

"That's vampires, Mr. Smarty Pants," says the other girl, the one I figure must be Petey's sister. Her swimming cap is unbuckled with the earflaps folded up, and, although I still can't see her face very well, I can tell that Petey's right—she's stacked. She's wearing a two-piece, and her breasts seem to bob in the water as if they're completely separate from the rest of her body.

"We saw *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy*," Janet tells Petey. "And, boy, was it scary!"

"What was so scary about it?" asks Petey. He's got a blond crewcut and a short, wide body. "Was their mommy a vampire or something?"

" 'Mummy,' you twerp—not 'mommy,' " his sister says.

My father sticks his arms straight out in front of him and proceeds to lurch in stiff-armed zombie-fashion toward Janet, who shrieks with delight and starts splashing him with water. "The mummy!" she shouts. "Watch out for the mummy!"

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"If you splash water in my drink," my mother says, "it's the mommy you'll have to watch out for, not the mummy."

We all laugh, and my father wades over toward my mother and me. "Hand me my drink, will you, Chess?" he says. "It's the one on the left, I think, but you'd better taste it to be sure."

We both can see which drink is his, but I take a sip anyway, recognizing this as one of my dad's sensitive little gestures, treating me like a grown-up to give me a boost in front of the girls. But I'm not sure I want him doing me any favors. "Wow!" I say, wrinkling my nose. "I think maybe you forgot to add the Coca Cola."

"A little stiff, is it?" my dad says.

Before I can answer, my mom chimes in with, "If that doesn't sound like the punch line to a joke I know—"

Feeling a little panicky at what she might say next, I hand my father the drink as if I haven't even heard her. Without a word, I put my towel on the back of a chair, step past Carolyn and Linda to the edge of the pool, and dive into the water, keeping my legs together and trying for the highest arc I can so as to make the least possible splash. First, there's the cold rush as I hit the water, then the sudden silence and the feeling of weightlessness, and finally the slow motion of my body moving underwater, as slick and sinuous as a snake weaving through tall grass. I'm pretty good at swimming underwater, so instead of coming right up, I decide to stay under and see if I can swim from one end of the pool to the other and back again without coming up for air. From down here, I can't see anyone's head, just bodies illuminated by the pool lights, the girls' and my mother's bare legs crisscrossing back and forth, the pink soles of their feet flashing, my father's legs like pale hairy columns. At the shallow end, as I'm turning to push off from the wall, my right knee scrapes against the bottom. It stings, but I keep going, managing to make it back to the other end before I come bursting to the surface for air, the cool silence suddenly broken by the sharp-edged noise of voices, the water's myriad slapping sounds, the indistinct background static of the night around us, as if the stars were distantly buzzing. I brush the water from my eyes and then, holding on to the edge of the pool with my elbow, I raise my knee up out of the water to see how badly I've scraped myself. The tight skin over my kneecap is raw and speckled with watery blood, so, by way of some immediate

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first aid, I lean forward, bring the wound to my mouth, and suck on it, my jaw muscles tightening at the coppery taste of blood against my tongue.

"Hurt yourself?" my father asks.

"Naw," I tell him. "Just a flesh wound."

"The chlorine should keep it clean."

"Yeah—it's just a scratch—"

"Kiss it and make it better," my mother says. "That's what I always do—isn't it, man o' mine?" She swats a splash of water flirtatiously at my father with the flat of her hand, the one not holding her drink.

"Pump it a little so it doesn't get stiff," my father says to me.

My mother rattles the ice cubes in her drink. "And here I always thought it was the other way around," she says. Her voice has that sly sound it gets whenever she's being what she calls "naughty."

I don't know exactly what she means. I think it's a joke, but no one laughs. Still, I can tell that something is going on, and it's just the sort of thing I want no part of. This is one of those moments when, completely against my conscious will, I find myself wondering again whether my mother might not actually be a little crazy. Because off and on for a long time now, this has seemed a real possibility to me, which is why my father is the anchor I've always relied on. I take a deep breath and dive underwater again, back into the sweet silence, spearing my cupped hands in front of me and then scooping them back in a wide arc as if I were digging my way past these anonymous female bodies with their splayed legs and winking crotches. I close my eyes, trying to tunnel my way to where it's safe to open them again. When I do, I'm next to Janet and Petey in the shallow end. I give Janet's ankles a good squeeze to show how easily I could flip her over if I wanted to. She lets out a happy shriek, and I roll over and float on my back, squirting a stream of water through my front teeth a foot in the air like a whale's spout.

"Thar she blows!" Janet shouts, repeating the lines I've taught her. "Moby Dick off the starboard bow!"

"Here's a question for you," my mother says to no one in particular. "If Moby Dick is a male, as his name certainly indicates, why is it always 'Thar *she* blows'? Did you ever wonder about that? Sounds mighty fishy, if you ask me."

"Fishy?" I say. "But whales aren't fish, they're mammals."

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Carolyn and Linda both laugh, and I feel a happy surge.

"What's that got to do with the birds and the bees?" my mother says.

I hear Janet tell Petey, "That was the other movie we saw—"

"What was?"

"*The Birds and the Bees.*"

"Was it a scary one, too?" Petey asks, and I'm thinking, yeah, in a way there's nothing scarier than the birds and the bees, but Janet says, "No, silly, it's a comedy—"

"I heard it was a real scream," says the girl who's not Petey's sister. "My cousin saw it." I like the fact that, even though Janet's so much younger than she is, she's not too stuck up to talk to her. She's the more slightly built of the two girls, with a certain way of lowering her head and looking up from under her eyebrows that gets to me. I try to guess whether she's Carolyn or Linda and decide that she looks more like the Carolyn type, although I can't say why exactly. I wonder whether people would peg me and my father for a couple of Chesters. I try to imagine my father as a Frank or a Bob or a Jim, but I can't manage it. My mother's real name is Elizabeth, but everybody calls her Betty, which somehow suits her to a tee.

My father is standing waist-deep in the water by my mother holding his drink, and as I turn back on my stomach to do the breaststroke, I see her reach her leg out and rub the top of her foot against his rear end. She's not even being discreet about the way she does it, either—Carolyn and Linda can probably see what she's doing. "Hey, there, cowboy," she says. "My glass is empty. How about me and you mosey on back to the bunkhouse for a little ol' refill?"

My father glances quickly around at each of us in turn, looking like a guilty man checking out the jury in a courtroom drama. He clears his throat and says, "Watch Janet, will you, Chess? Mom and I are going to head on back to the—back to the room, but you take your time—give us a chance to get, you know, get changed and cleaned up and all—"

"Our parents went in to watch 'Lawrence Welk,'" says Petey's sister.

"Yeah," says Petey. "Uh-one and uh-two and uh-three—"

"Sure," I tell my father, feeling exactly like I'm coming down with a bout of motion sickness, as if that were possible just from

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swimming, especially since I've practically been living on Dramamine, what with being on board ship for two weeks and now driving cross-country. "Don't worry about us," I say. "We'll see you in a little while—"

"That'd be swell," my father says. "Why don't you give us about half an hour?"

"At least," says my mother. "As dirty as I feel, I'm going to need a real lo-o-ong shower." And before I can look away, she reaches her arms back to grip the edge of the pool behind her so that her breasts jut forward, boosts herself out of the water backside first, and, in one catlike motion, lifts her parted legs under her into a squat and stands, droplets of water flinging off of her like sparks.

My father is wading slowly toward the concrete steps at the corner of the shallow end, pausing for a second as he passes Janet to give her arm a squeeze. "Mind your brother now," he tells her.

"Oh, Daddy," Janet whines, but then instead of complaining she turns eagerly to me. "C'we play underwater tag, Chessie? Can we, can we, can we?"

"Sure," I say. "Sure, why not?" And I stand up and stretch my arms over my head, trying to make my nausea disappear the way you'd work a cramp out of a muscle. "I'll even be It," I tell her.

"Just don't make too much noise," my father says. "It's getting late." He's holding my mother's short beach robe open for her, and after she slips it on, she pulls off her swimming cap, then bends over and shakes out her hair. As they walk away, my father puts his hand on the back of her neck, and she wraps an arm around his waist and gives him a bump with her hip. The pool light catches in her tawny mane and makes it shine like a halo, even though right now an angel is about the last thing she resembles. And then, like some kind of delayed reaction, this is the moment it hits me: everybody's father, when you come right down to it, including my own, is secretly, by definition, a motherfucker.

"*Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-o-o-o-o,*" Petey softly howls. "That's what those coyotes sound like—it's their mating call."

"What's a 'mating call'?" asks Janet.

Even now, across the distance of all these years, I can still feel myself standing there suspended, waiting for the nausea to pass as I watch my parents nuzzle their way back to the room. The water is lapping like some lupine tongue against my bare stomach with

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a tickling sensation, as if I can feel the hair down there already starting to grow.

"Your mother is so-o-o sexy," Petey's sister says to me, the white tops of her breasts bobbing.

I shrug, acting casual to disguise the fact that inside my swimming trunks I'm beginning to stiffen. "Yeah, she used to be a model."

"And your father is really cool," says the other girl, the one I'd been sentimentally thinking of as the shy one. "Just my type, too—tall, dark, and handsome."

"Yeah," I say, "he's a captain in the Army. We just got back from a tour of duty in the Far East." I'm looking back and forth from one girl to the other. "You wanna play some underwater tag?" I say, suddenly so hungry for the chase that I'm actually licking my lips in anticipation of the places I might tag them. "I'll be It. No rules except there's no getting out of the pool, and I've gotta have my head underwater to tag you."

They smile at each other and nod, but I get the feeling they know what they're in for. "Okay," Petey's sister says, "you're on."

"But what's a 'mating call'?" asks Janet.

"*Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-o-o-o-o,*" Petey howls.

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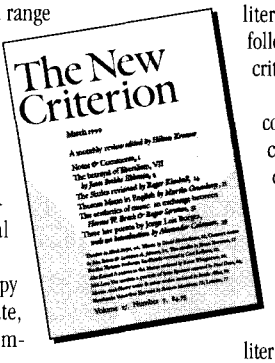


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## Sonnet

Where it begins will remain a question
for the time being at least which is to
say for this lifetime and there is no
other life that can be this one again
and where it goes after that only one
at a time is ever about to know
though we have it by heart as one and though
we remind each other on occasion

how often may the clarinet rehearse
alone the one solo before the one
time that is heard after all the others
telling the one thing that they all tell of
it is the sole performance of a life
come back I say to it over the waters

## The Open Land

Mist iridescent over the rice fields
mountains far away those gray fish running
so that they scarcely seem to be moving
rolled hay camped nearby in shaven meadows
sleeping into winter as the roads sleep
into themselves into their unseen age
leading the whole of their lives while the light
appears always to come from just before
so that all of it seems to be familiar
known in passing like clouds but the only
words for it are ways to tell of distance

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MARILYN NELSON

# For the Feast of Corpus Christi

for P. and D.

Songbirds skitter among the rafters,
scissoring in and out of the high stained windows.
Abba Jacob watches them a moment,
fingering through his tousled hair.
He looks at the gathered waiting,
cocks his head, smiles.

*Today is the feast day* of the mewling newborn in the hay,
the thirsty teacher wiping his brow, the dying man's iron
grimace.
Today we celebrate a squalling toddler with a load in his
pants,
a runny-nosed five-year-old, a boy with scabbed knees.
We celebrate Jesus, who suffered and died.
Who laughed, who sneezed, who scratched where he itched.
He did not live by bread alone,
but he lived by bread. And he liked
a cool drink of fresh-dipped water
drawn smiling from the well.
He tasted. He saw.
When he stepped out onto a wave his feet got muddy.
He faced forward as we do, with fingers-crossed faith.

*Six rows from the door,* Amma Mama notices
the island echolessness of the morning's songbirds.
She never dreamed, though she'd always somehow known,
she'd be here again, watching him spacegaze as he speaks.
Hearing him laugh. He described last night's dinner wine
as "masculine," explained that its taste was what
every man would like to be:

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intelligent, handsome, reliable, and a little bit rough
around the edges. His voice, she thinks,
is almost sweeter than the birdsong.

*As his body, the church,* we remember
ourselves in our Eucharist,
giving thanks for the assurance
that we shall not end here.
Trekking through the desert of brevity toward this
shimmering Zion,
is it bread we eat, or manna?
Wine we drink, or dew?
We make Eucharist for the daily miracles
which sustain us: for food, drink, and fellowship,
for the promise of Christ.

*The pause fills* with twitter. Beyond faint surf,
vast silence.
Abba Jacob raises his eyebrows, shrugs.
*If we are* the body of Christ,
then our bodies are Christ's bodies, too, non?
Your bodies, mine.
A thousand years ago, exiled for his writings,
St. Simeon continued to describe indwelling light.
If we truly love Christ, he wrote, we *inhabit* Christ.
Every part of us, even the most secret, the parts we hide in
shame,
every part becomes his, and is therefore healed, hallowed,
beautiful
and radiant with loving light. When that happens, everything
we see
we see gently, every word we speak listens, every act is
reverent,
every caress is a blessing.

*Around Amma Mama* backs straighten, heads slowly nod.
His darklit eyes beacon the pews.
*Those of you who have partners,* who have vowed
a love without ceasing, when you lie together, make love

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to the immeasurable mystery of spirit enfleshed.
Touch each other with Christ's touch.
Kiss each other with Christ's mouth.
Give to and receive from each other Christ's body.
Your fingers a sacrament of tenderness.

*Blessing air* pocked with gasps,
Abba Jacob says *Amen.*

## Morning-Star

for Aaron Shalom Ungar

> For each child that's born,
> a morning-star rises
> and sings to the universe
> who we are.
> —"Sweet Honey in the Rock"

Welcome to you, little Aaron Shalom,
now the youngest under-Ungar
in the family home,
but soon to be known as
a whole, new me,
unique as a snowflake
miles above the dreaming sea.

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TIMOTHY MURPHY

# The Muromachi Cranes

With outstretched wings the dancers pirouette.
  Arching graceful necks
  they open great green beaks
and join their voices in a wild duet.

Preening and strutting on a silken stage
  the cranes are not dismayed
  that painted feathers fade.
Immortals grow more ravishing with age.

Contentedly they wade the swirling ink
  of their appointed pool
  where spawning minnows school
and poets are prohibited to drink.

As the sun sets on snow peaks in the West
  snow cranes contemplate
  the chirps which emanate
from the lone egg sequestered in their nest.

Over that egg a four-toed foot is curled
  as though a Taoist sage
  in a thatched hermitage
slowly revolves the ovum of the world.

Note: The character Fu means truth and depicts a bird's foot above a fledgling. Confucius said that far-reaching speculations can be linked to this image.

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PATRICIA HOOPER

# The Statues

Imagine for a moment we are in
a garden:

wasn't there
a place like this in which
we used to walk, the trees
so undisturbed, the flowers
almost motionless, and where
it seemed that time was stilled?

And the statues—weren't they
always about to move
their perfect fingers, touch
each other's arms?

There was a river, yes,
but it was out of sight
beyond the pond,

and fountains that were filled
once only, since their water
fell to the shallow pool
and was returned.

*The gods,* you said, referring
to the statues. Yes,
we stood among them once,

not of them but apart
from time which kept on passing
somewhere else,

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the place where we'd return.
Was it because
we met so seldom there that we were given
a moment's presence large enough
to hold us?

Or was it
because there would be no future
that we were held?

## Eve

Now that I know
the limits of the garden, how the leaves
spill as the wind commands them, how the flowers
blacken, the vines wither, the roots heave—

I scatter to the earth these gold seeds
and see how the breeze takes them, the birds carry
their destiny without forethought, without design;

and learn how chance their lives are, who were meant
only to live and blossom, how they fall,
some to the tilled furrows, some to the sand.

Now that I know my will
is finite, that the streams
of my own body follow the moon's courses
and that I am borne as dust in the wind's hand—

I sing these supplications even as
I did the day you cast me out, my song
grown darker in your absence. Hear me now,
your creature: when I chose

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the bright fruits of your secrets, were you not
the one who made them ripen as you made
my readiness, my hunger? How could you
not save me, you who had given me these gifts?

## Equinox

Clouds go over. The maples flare again.
In the garden the last bright asters
blaze in the autumn air
the way my skin burned
when you turned to me
in the chill breeze off the lake.

The days are cool now,
the nights are deep, and long.
At the feeder a red-winged blackbird
has come in from the fields
and sorts among the seeds.
A rare visitor—
even if he finds what he wants,
he'll never stay here.

These are the last days.
Already the stalks of lilies
have withered, and the gold petals
of the rose melt on the grass.
But the sky flames, more intense.
I didn't see it coming.
For the few days you were here with me,
all the familiar warnings disappeared.

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DIANE THIEL

# Twelve-Day Buddhist Silent Retreat

They fell in love while they were washing pots
and had no voices for twelve days—they had
watched each other through their meditations,
fallen deep into each other's fields.

On the twelfth day, they could speak with words again.

He was a boilermaker from Boston.
She, a Miami anthropologist.
He was married, with three children at home.
She had none, and was looking for someone.

He asked her then—What's anthropology?

She felt her voice in her throat like a live thing,
and she could only smile and laugh back
to the pots, huge and shiny in their hands,
reflecting their faces like children.

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SAMUEL HAZO

# A Time of No Shadows

Immortality?
Too general a concept.
Some say it's never-ending time,
which means it's long on myth
but short on meaning.
Some say
it's never to be known until
it's ours.
Some say, some say . . .
I stand with those who think
it could be quick as any instant
going on and on and on
within itself like poetry or music
or a kiss.
That comes as close
as anything to God's "I AM
WHO AM."
No past.
No memory.
No future but the time at hand
that's passing even as it's born . . .
Once I was driving due southeast
through Pennsylvania.
Highways
were broad and dangerous and everyone's.
As I ran out of Pennsylvania,
farm by farm, I noticed
border signs that welcomed me
to Maryland where Rand McNally
said that Maryland began.
I knew the earth was still
the earth in Maryland or Pennsylvania.

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I knew I stayed the same,
border or no border . . .
From here
into hereafter could be just
like that—our selfsame selves
translated instantly from state
to state to God alone
knows what . . .
That's immortality.

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WILLIAM LOGAN

# Nativity

The sad blue figures from the north had come
across a major desert and a sea,
hungry at first, their horses giving out,
the boats struck dumb on unforgiving shores.

The city was no city of the plain.
Women and men still coupled under sheets
and spoke half-true endearments to each other.
They wondered what three kings were doing there

and what they paid the kneeling prostitutes.
Beyond the blacksmith's stood a burnt-out inn
the comet passed over like an asterisk.
They came to see, and saw they were mistaken.
They swept away disheartened, and just missed
the door that opened on a miracle.

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DOROTHY SUTTON

# Gorgeous George

Duke Ellington played there
(can't call it *working*, he said),
John Philip Sousa, Isadora Duncan,
Will Rogers, W. C. Handy—
blazing stars all shooting their way
to our Lexington, Kentucky, stage,
the old auditorium at Woodland Park,
the noise most deafening for Gorgeous George.
Platinum blond waves cascading,
cauliflowered ears, his nose

no stranger to fracture and duress.
Satin trunks with robes to match:
purple one day, pink the next.
A stuffy valet decked out in tuxedo
atomized him with jasmine spray,
held his robe while he slithered in.
He struggled against "The Masked Avenger"
and Mr. Mojo during World War II.
We knew he was really wrestling Tojo
(our boys were dying over there),

acting out sweaty morality plays
of hammerlocks and body slams.
They outlawed wrestling the fans got so wild.
The ban didn't last. What lasted there
was Gorgeous George, the first wrestler
to become a star. He died today
at eighty-four: his shoulders pinned
to the mat for good, his soul wrenched free
from the clinch of death, his robe in glory
no match for his platinum hair.

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RICHARD HORNBY

# Williams and Miller on Broadway

DEAD MEN RARELY WRITE PLAYS, which is why the Broadway production of a new play by Tennessee Williams, who died in 1983, came as a shock this season. Never published or produced in Williams' lifetime, *Not About Nightingales* is an early work, dating from 1938, six years before his first success, *The Glass Menagerie.* It is not all that unusual to dredge up early works by great writers; what is unusual is to have one turn out to be good.

*Nightingales* was hiding in plain sight. Williams mentions it in his writings, and there are references to it in several of his biographies. The manuscript, with many early drafts, has been in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin, available to anyone who wanted to read it. Vanessa Redgrave, in Houston a few years ago performing Shakespeare, decided to drive over to the University to have a look. What she found was a powerful prison drama, more socially conscious than Williams' later plays, and hence just the kind of thing to excite a lefty like herself. She persuaded Trevor Nunn to direct the piece last season at the Royal National Theatre in London, where it was a huge success. It came to Broadway in February, at the Circle in the Square Theatre.

Influenced by the "Living Newspaper" productions of the Federal Theatre at the time, *Nightingales* was inspired by a current event, the torture and killing of four inmates at a Philadelphia prison. Protesting their frightful conditions with a hunger strike, they were punished by being sent to "Klondike," a sealed room with banks of steam radiators capable of raising the temperature to two hundred degrees. Their deaths became a *cause célèbre* for prison reform.

Williams sets the prison in an unnamed city, apparently in the South. The warden (masterfully played by Vanessa's brother Corin) is a psychotic monster, foreshadowing the power-hungry brutes of Williams' later plays like Stanley Kowalski, Big Daddy Pollitt, or Boss Finley, but with none of their redeeming virtues. He not only beats and starves the inmates, serving them substandard food and pilfering the money that it saves, but also views his female employees as sexual prey. The play begins with a young woman named Eva applying for a clerical job; she gradually realizes that its requisites include covering up for her boss, as well as suffering his attentions, but, desperate for work in those terrible Depression years, she takes it. Eva is a relatively underdeveloped character, but in her mixture of sensitivity and tenacity, she foreshadows

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Williams' great heroines of the future, like Blanche DuBois and Maggie the Cat.

The play alternates between the warden's office and the prisoners' cells. Williams does not idealize the prisoners. They indulge in petty tyrannies themselves, led by a tough con named Butch O'Fallon. Both the Warden and Butch express their admiration for Mussolini, a figure whom Williams regarded with loathing. Williams' leftist credentials are further evident in his creation of a stock 1930s proletarian hero, a trusty named Jim Allison who edits the prison newspaper and reads poetry. Working in the warden's office with Eva, he tells her that if he could write poetry himself, unlike Keats he would write "not about nightingales," but about horrors like the prison and its Klondike torture room. Predictably, Jim and Eva fall in love.

To protest the bad food, Butch engineers a hunger strike that gets him and three others sent to Klondike. Jim, who had been unjustly despised by the other cons as a stool pigeon, devises a rescue, which turns into a full scale prison riot. The prisoners kill the warden, but only Jim escapes—perhaps to his death, since he has to leap far into the surrounding harbor and swim a long distance. The play ends with the faint hope that some day Jim and Eva might be reunited.

Watching the first act of the play, I was impressed by the quality of the dialog, but felt that overall it was standard stuff. Although *Nightingales* was entered in a play contest established by the Group Theatre, with twenty-one scenes it is structured more like a movie scenario, and I began musing on how Warner Brothers might have cast it in one of their naturalistic prison movies: Butch would be played by James Cagney, the warden perhaps by Victor Jory, Eva by Jean Arthur, Jim by John Garfield. (Reading the text afterwards, I even found a stage direction that has Jim smoking "à la Jules Garfield," the actor's stage name before he went to Hollywood.) The second act, however, had lyricism and intensity far beyond that of any prison film ever made. Williams contrasts the gritty naturalism—the sweat, pain, and vomit—with surreal scenes, as Butch dreams of an old prostitute girlfriend. An excursion steamer named the *Lorelei* is heard out in the harbor, playing dance music. Then, the Klondike scenes hit like episodes from Dante; at first the men defiantly sing popular songs, but as the warden orders higher and higher temperatures they gradually begin to succumb. With steam blasting all around him, Butch kills a fellow prisoner to put him out of his misery, then nearly dies himself before Jim cleverly frees him.

Much of the power of these scenes was the result of Nunn's brilliant staging. Flamboyant stage direction is too much the rage nowadays, but in addition to flamboyance, Nunn brings an acute literary sensitivity, so that a play's meanings are drawn out rather than obscured. One insightful idea here among many was to have the warden's office onstage at all times. The Circle in the Square has a long, awkward thrust stage that has defeated many a director, but here it worked perfectly, with the calm, drab office far downstage counterpointing the turbulent scenes in

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the cells upstage. To see the warden serenely ordering higher temperatures, and the simultaneously suffering inmates, was a potent irony. Such concurrent staging would have been difficult on an ordinary proscenium stage—and nearly impossible in a film. (A split screen, rarely used in film, is an awkward device, but concurrent staging on a good-sized thrust stage looks so natural as to be inevitable.)

Nunn's designer, Richard Hoover, created an overall setting that deserves every award it will probably win. The dismal institutional feel, the 1930s ambience, the sense of isolation and confinement, were valid and graphic. The cells, benches, and office furniture were all of steel, with the grayness extending even to the costumes (designed by Karyl Newman) and props, so that the general appearance was that of an old black-and-white movie. (Even an American flag was in black and white, while a blouse described as chartreuse was actually slate gray.)

The cast of *Nightingales*, largely unchanged from the London production, included both American and British actors. Only the program would have told you the difference, as the entire cast was splendid, with flawless accents. James Black, a fine American actor with extensive regional theatre credits, was a strong Butch; Finbar Lynch, an actor I have seen frequently at the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, made Jim seem winsome and optimistic, in a role that could easily degenerate into a woeful cliché. Sherri Parker Lee, apparently an American but with credits at major theatres in both countries, similarly avoided clichés, making Eva straightforward and understated. As noted, Corin Redgrave, an actor rarely seen in the U.S., was marvelous. His Southern American accent was impeccable, while his energy, sly humor, and sexual innuendo made him the man you love to hate. Oddly enough, there was no role in the play for his sister; her promotion of the play was entirely unselfish.

Because Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams became successful within a few years of each other, just over fifty years ago, it is common to link them. Both are seen as having written a handful of major plays in the 1940s and 1950s, then going into a long decline. This has some validity with regard to Williams. Perhaps because of his heavy drug and alcohol abuse, his late works show only flashes of his earlier brilliance; none is major, nor, for that matter, even as good as *Nightingales*. With regard to Miller, however, the notion of a decline is false. Many of his later plays (*After the Fall, The Price, The American Clock*) are as good as or better than his earlier ones. What changed for both writers was the American theatre itself, so that their plays had to be done off-Broadway, and then, ironically, in England, where their reputation today is higher than ever. Two of Miller's recent plays premiered there, and now it took an English actress and an English director to do Williams' *Nightingales*, a neglected work by one of America's greatest writers. What a disgrace to the American theatre that a play this good was never done here before!

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The other canard about Williams and Miller is that where the former is supposedly an apolitical writer, concerned only with poetic dialog and psychologically deep characters, the latter is like Jim Allison, writing "not about nightingales," but about social problems. The *Nightingales* production revealed the depths of Williams' social conscience, but social commentary is not absent in his later plays. Consider Tom's bitter remarks in *Glass Menagerie* on the Depression, the rise of Fascism, Guernica; or Boss Finley's racist hatemongering in *Sweet Bird of Youth*; or Big Daddy's surprising plea for tolerance in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* Conversely, a fiftieth-anniversary production of Miller's *Death of a Salesman,* running on Broadway concurrently with the Williams piece, was a stimulus to rethink Miller's reputation as a left-wing propagandist.

*Death of a Salesman* bears no resemblance to left-wing literature of the thirties. Willy is no proletarian hero; not only is he not in the working class, but he lacks the naive idealism, the burning sense of injustice combined with the longing for a better world, typical of protagonists like Jim Allison. Willy loves the capitalist system. He is an idealist, to be sure, like most tragic heroes, but his ideal is the notion that to succeed in business it is important to be "well liked," more important than knowledge or hard work or honesty, or even ruthlessness, which earlier capitalists might have believed in. He goes to his death believing this credo, against all the evidence. No one in the play, least of all Willy himself, suggests that his problems would be swept away by a revolution.

The capitalist system, then, is not the problem in *Salesman,* but rather Willy's understanding of it. Nor is there a real villain in the play. Willy's boss, Howard, comes closest to that role when he retires Willy for non-performance, but Howard's failing is not ruthlessness but lack of understanding, a weakness that links him to Willy himself. The American economy at the time was dominated by large corporations whose charismatic founders, the "robber barons," were long dead. Instead of clear-cut enemies, there were vast, confusing hierarchies. Miller was one of the first writers to understand this fundamental change. Late capitalism is depicted in the play as having become impersonal and bureaucratic; instead of a class struggle there is anomie.

The fiftieth-anniversary production was admirable, fully worthy of this play that in five decades has been translated into fifty languages, and performed in countries all over the world (including China, directed by Miller himself). Brian Dennehy played Willy. A bear of a man known for playing Hollywood cops and villains, he is also a fine stage actor—the best Lopakhin in Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* I have ever seen, for example—well suited to playing Willy, which he did with sensitivity and force. The production originated at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, under the direction of its Artistic Director, Robert Falls.

Many of the supporting cast were from the Goodman, so that their Chicago accents certainly did not sound like Brooklynese! Nonetheless, they performed skillfully, with great emotional range and depth, especially Kevin Anderson as Biff and Elizabeth Franz as Linda. The latter

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brought this part, and indeed the whole play, into focus. Because Willy ignores his wife or takes her for granted much of the time, and cheats on her (though he does love her), it would be easy for audiences to forget about her, but Miller never does. Her love of her family suffuses this otherwise bleak play with warmth. She is the most clear-sighted person in the whole play, who has some of its best speeches, including the memorable line about her husband, "Attention must be finally paid to such a person." In the end, *Salesman* turns out to be not about social protest, but about family relationships, and the poetry of the common man or woman.

This past season, the American Repertory Theatre celebrated its twentieth year. Founded by critic and educator Robert Brustein at the Loeb Drama Center at Harvard, it is the leading theatre company in the Boston area, and, in theory, one of the leading companies in the country. It has premiered works by many noted writers, including Christopher Durang, Jules Feiffer, David Mamet, Marsha Norman, Ronald Ribman, Sam Shepard, Paula Vogel, and Derek Walcott. It is also noted for novel productions of the classics, which get extensive coverage in the national and international theatre magazines.

My trip to the A.R.T. in March was the first time I have seen the company, though I know the Loeb Theatre itself very well, having acted and directed professionally there in the sixties. Back in those days I also saw many Harvard student productions at the Loeb, which were usually overintellectual to the point of being conceited, with ingenious ideas conflicting with the text, and often with common sense. For example, in one production the director had the actors start their speeches well *before* their cues, so that if one actor were saying "Methinks I see my father," the other would respond "Where, my lord?" about the time the first was saying "Methinks." The productions I saw at the A.R.T. this trip were not as bad as that, but the sophomoric style lingers. A muddled production of Ibsen's *The Master Builder* alternated in repertory with a jejune, heavy new play by novelist Don DeLillo.

*The Master Builder* was directed by Kate Whoriskey, recently a student of Brustein, who assisted, and adapted the script. The production was heavily stylized, but not in any revelatory way. These days, "postmodern" staging usually means taking explicit or implicit metaphors from the text and making them visual. I have nothing against this per se. The recent New York Theatre Workshop production of O'Neill's *More Stately Mansions* (reviewed here in the last issue) used the technique to draw out meanings from an inchoate, murky text, to brilliant effect. But when the meanings are obvious, expressing them visually gilds the lily. Also, the actors in the O'Neill production had energy and passion, even when performing something as outlandish as a nude wrestling match, while the actors in the Ibsen seemed confused by the staging. With one striking exception, their performances were lifeless.

Whoriskey's opening scene was the most artificial in the show. Ibsen

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sets it in Solness's workroom, which here had all the employees in glass booths, communicating via microphones, behind Solness's modernistic office on the forestage. This was not an updating of the play, however; the costumes were of 1892, when the play was written. It was simply the director's and the designer's way of telegraphing us an obvious statement about the characters' relationships. The deeper, more important symbolism of the play was neglected. Ibsen's opening scene is actually the most naturalistic one in it; Hilda's entrance lifts the play out of naturalism into the symbolist realm of trolls, castles in the air, and forbidden sexual fantasy. It is Ibsen's trick on the audience, who think they are going to see a social problem play about Solness's abuse of power. The unfortunate irony here was that Whoriskey made the opening scene into a fanciful, stylized one, then staged the Hilda scenes flatly and unimaginatively.

She was unable to squelch the stunning performance of Kristin Flanders as Hilda, however. In her braided red hair, she looked like a typical Norwegian country girl, yet she had a glint in her eye and an innuendo to her speeches suggesting something demonic. Alive, blunt, sexy, with a good resonant voice, Flanders was the best Hilda I have ever seen. Christopher McCann as Solness hardly matched her, however; although he has a strong bony face, and delivered lines with the requisite irony, he looked too young for the role, and was very stiff in the shoulders, like Boris Karloff playing the Frankenstein monster. The rest of the cast was even stiffer, making me wonder if the director's deadly hand was forcing that rigidity on them, or if they were just plain inept performers. Jeremy Geidt played Knut Brovik as a parody of an old man, posing rather than acting; Will LeBow shouted his way through the role of Dr. Herdal; Sharon Scruggs droned through the role of Mrs. Solness. There is a difference between repressed passion and *no* passion.

As mentioned, Brustein provided the translation, called here an "adaptation." There has not been a major translation of Ibsen for over thirty years; perhaps it is time for a new one. But modernizing is one thing, while modern clichés are another. Phrases like, "You must think I'm a lucky guy" or "rather than build a shithouse" were grating, and far from what Ibsen actually wrote. Brustein even had Solness say, "I have never sang a note in my life" (perhaps just an acting slip), and speak of building "machines for living," prefiguring Le Corbusier. But who in 1892 would ever have described a house as a machine? You would have been hard pressed even to find a machine in it.

Don DeLillo's *Valparaiso* concerns a man who buys a plane ticket to Valparaiso, Indiana, and ends up in Valparaiso, Chile. This mildly amusing idea might have yielded a good light comedy. It is certainly plausible; I recall some years ago a couple intending to go to Panama City, Panama, ending up in Panama City, Florida, just as a hurricane hit, stranding them there for days. This became a running joke in Florida, where the northern Gulf Coast is referred to as "the redneck Riviera."

*Valparaiso*, however, is no comedy, but a hyperserious social problem

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play, focussing on how the hero's misadventure is treated in the press and on television. Brustein, in a program note, maintains that the play "exposes the media's ravenous invasion of privacy," but this is false. The hero, Michael Majeski, *wants* to be interviewed. He gives up his job, signs autographs, even has a Web site. The reporters and interviewers in the play are often bored with him (as are we) and his silly escapade, and if anything are reluctant to pry. Everything is seen from Majeski's point of view, with nothing much about the inner workings of the media.

Nevertheless, by focussing on his hero's obsession with achieving instant fame, DeLillo might still have written a good play. Unfortunately, this obsession goes nowhere. Everything is presented through exposition rather than action, including the original trip. Majeski tells the story over and over, until you want to scream. A parody of the Oprah Winfrey shows drags on forever, without evoking a single laugh. There is a lot of pseudopoetic dialog, as in, "Her nipples are sensitive to messages from orbiting satellites." Halfway through the second act, something finally happens; Majeski's wife becomes pregnant by another man. But even this event (presented again through exposition) goes nowhere. The conclusion shows Majeski re-enacting the flight while the Oprah figure and her sidekick chant more poetry. Majeski apparently tried to commit suicide by asphyxiating himself in a restroom on the plane. I still am not sure what to make of this, since it has nothing to do with fame or the media. Perhaps it is meant to suggest that his original going astray was intentional, and that a desire for fame has something to do with a death wish.

David Wheeler directed this maladroit piece, with good contemporary settings by Karl Eigsti and costumes by Catherine Zuber. The cast was quite competent; Will Patton as the hero had a nice, bland, Midwestern look, and was quite well spoken, while the rest of the cast were all better than their counterparts in *Master Builder.* The failure of this production relates back to the playwright alone.

An academic friend of mine who teaches at a university in the Boston area said he never goes to the A.R.T. anymore, because "there are easier ways to get angry." It would be unfair to judge this company by his wisecrack, or by two productions alone. Nevertheless, as a standard, they were well below what you would see at other major American theatre companies.

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JOHN LOUGHERY

# The Hard Subjects

IN THE REPRESENTING AS MUCH AS THE REARING, children are hard to get right. "Ashcan Kids," a winter exhibition at the Berry-Hill Galleries in New York, was full of mawkish or inept pictures of youngsters circa 1910 painted by the urban realists—George Luks, Robert Henri, William Glackens, John Sloan, and George Bellows—who were part of the loosely related anti-academic group known as the "Ashcan school" of American art. To be fair, there were also plenty of agreeable paintings on view—paintings as arrangements of color and form, displays of drawing and brushwork—but the problem was that they seemed to have so little to say about their individual subjects, or childhood itself, that could be called authentic or probing in any serious way. It is the same in literature or in film: as a theme, youth looks easy (we've all been there, after all), but the opposite is true. Three or four paintings, however, justified both the conception and the actual experience of the show at Berry-Hill. Two in particular, by the front desk, stopped me in my tracks. Henri's *Willie Gee* from the Newark Museum and Bellows' *Paddy Flannigan* from a private collection: a black boy, not yet a teenager, perhaps a midtown newsboy, and a white street kid in a tattered shirt, his exposed chest pale and lean. Both exist without context; standing against a dark, paint-scumbled background, their faces and torsos tell enough of the story. I have never seen a reproduction that got the subtle tones of these two paintings right, and so the aura of the originals was intense—undiminished by overfamiliarity. Willie and Paddy side-by-side, one wall to themselves, allowed for a simultaneous appreciation of several disparate matters: first-rate craftsmanship, the heartrending complications of being young in a society with no special concern for childhood, and curiosity about the fate of Henri's and Bellows' subjects. For, while it was easy to be thankful that they caught the eye of a major artist, it was hard not to reflect on the fact that they probably never saw their framed likenesses, certainly not in an upscale gallery or museum. Yet it was also hard to look at these two paintings—at these plaintive, dignified boys—without dwelling on color and draftsmanship, something that does not often happen in the either/or, social-commentary/aesthetic-form universe of the modern art world. The triumph of Henri and Bellows was in the way they balanced respect for their subjects (no false sentiment, no obvious propaganda, no palliatives for the middle-class patron) with their obligation to their art, their duty to create aesthetically complete images. How difficult this is to do was borne out by the

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rest of the exhibition, where we were awash in cheeriness and anecdote, on the one hand, or strong color and thick brushwork on the other. Insofar as any portrait subject can, Willie and Paddy held their own ground.

The Mary Cassatt retrospective, shown at the Chicago Art Institute in the autumn of 1998 and at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts last spring, was likewise full of kids. Cassatt's girls, though, present some of the same problems the Ashcan show highlighted but ultimately take us in another direction entirely. For one thing, Cassatt's years of self-imposed academic training and study of the Old Masters in France, Italy, and Spain gave her a sound basis in drawing. Skill is never an issue, and bodies exist in plausible relations to other bodies. What we are asked to ponder today, more than in past decades when Cassatt was viewed simply as an unsentimental representative of her class who knew the Impressionists, is how the little ones connect, or don't always connect, to the loving mother who holds or tends to them. Current scholarship stresses how seldom eye contact is made between mother and child in Cassatt's oils and pastels, how her girls appear to be reaching out to a world beyond their mothers—and how little these images have to do with the strict parameters of the genre they are ostensibly part of. (One recent commentator has bluntly written, "Cassatt was not a painter of the mother-and-child theme." Period.) With some paintings, this angle makes sense. *Woman and Child Driving* (1881) actually shows Cassatt's sister in a carriage with Degas's niece, so the bond is not actually maternal in the first place, but the girl is clearly in a world of her own. In others, the tenderness is palpable, even smothering in a way that does not seem coded or intentional. Often, the colors that align Cassatt to the Impressionist school work against the iconography. In the 1901 *Little Girl Leaning on Her Mother's Knee (Young Mother Sewing)*, for instance, the girl stares directly and meditatively at the artist (an unmarried woman painting her) and at us, indifferent to her mother's domestic duties, but the viewer is left to suffocate in prettiness, subverting a reasonable feminist interpretation.

On their own, away from mothers and guardians, the point is better made that Cassatt's children are not uniformly content or secure in the role their parents have assigned them. *Ellen Mary Cassatt in a White Coat* (1896) looks bundled to the point of being trapped in her fur-lined coat and vast, matching bonnet, not unlike Velasquez's Infantas, and *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* (1878) is apt to seem, for viewers of the 1990s, almost pre-Balthus. In a room of unusually compressed space, amid four of the plushest blue armchairs, a ten-year-old sprawls with her legs spread and hand behind her neck in a most indecorous pose for a child of affluence in the Gilded Age. There is a sufficiently lost quality to *Girl Arranging Her Hair* (1886) that Penguin used that image for years on its cover for Henry James's novella of innocence destroyed, *What Maisie Knew*. In a different mode, the *Alexander Cassatt and His Son* (1884) could be taken as an *hommage* to masculinity and intergenerational affection, a

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realistic depiction of the artist's brother and his doting son, but something could be made, I suppose, of the way in which the two figures—the father seated in his chair with his paper in his lap, the boy on the arm of the chair leaning into his father—almost meld into one. As always, Cassatt's use of space might be offering clues of the sort we would automatically look for in Manet's family pictures or Degas's *Portrait of the Belleli Family.* The difficulty is that the strain in Degas and Manet is not so very far below the surface, not so politely masked by bright light and warm rooms. (Since the publication two years ago of Beth Archer Brombert's fine critical biography of Manet, *Rebel in a Frock Coat,* it is impossible to view Manet's portraits of his wife and alleged stepson from anything other than a dark psychological perspective.) Gratitude and affection for a family that supported her ambitions, in the long run; brooding concern about her father's disapproval and the narrowness of the expectations—marriage, childraising—that Cassatt herself thwarted: if both factors played a part in the artist's life, there is no reason they could not overlap as subtexts in her painting.

These questions of how deeply to probe with Cassatt arise even with the works that don't deal with childhood or motherhood. *Five O'Clock Tea* (1880), from the collection of the MFA itself, is one of the artist's masterpieces and was one of the finest paintings in the show. It is a good deal more mysterious, or at least less conventional, in its space and composition than numerous other genteel genre scenes that bring to mind the world of Henry James and William Merritt Chase. (The same could be said for the 1878 *At the Opera* and the 1894 *The Boating Party.*) There are grounds for feeling uneasy, for serious questioning, with this picture: the too-imposing silver tea service thrust toward the viewer, the odd absence from view of the woman the two guests are speaking to, the raised teacup that obscures (muzzles?) one of the women, the radical variations in brushwork. But when does "reading into" an image make sense, exposing layers of plausible meaning, and when does the process become a stretch or an academic exercise? With Mary Cassatt, the jury is still out and maybe always will be. The retrospective did justice to a woman who turned her back on glib anecdote and smarmy sentiment (the twin evils of late nineteenth-century American art), was a better colorist than one would know without seeing her work in quantity, and clearly profited from an open-minded study of Manet and Degas. To what degree her women without men, her women reading or absorbed in solitary thought, her theatergoers and spectators in the park (all observers more than observed), should earn her an equal footing with the Parisian avant-garde—one point of this exhibition—is something I still don't know. Intention and technique can be so subtle that we search for depths that are not there, rather than simply appreciate what is. In that sense, Cassatt might have more in common with Renoir and Pissarro than the deeper Manet and Degas.

Mary Cassatt was in her sixties when Pablo Picasso worked in his Blue

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and Rose Periods; she was still alive when he and Georges Braque refined the techniques of Cubism and altered forever our ideas about pictorial structure and the philosophical underpinnings of visual art. She was long gone, however, by the time covered in "Picasso and the War Years, 1937–1945" as, indeed, every earnest vestige of nineteenth-century culture had been swept away (for the moment) by the tidal wave of Modernism and a new world order defined by mechanization, Fascism, and mass extermination. Picasso's response to the upheavals of the 1930s and early 1940s was the focus of a carefully circumscribed winter exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum—the most recent in a series of late-1990s exhibitions that have examined the artist by way of discrete categories: Early Years, Portraits, Images of Women, Ceramics, and so on.

Picasso as a political animal, like Picasso as a sympathetic soul stirred by the pain of others or even a man interested in current events, is a hard sell in 1999. Yes, we know he was a Communist for many years and we know that that affiliation, especially in the 1930s, can signify genuine fellow-feeling for the poor as much as it does naiveté about the brutality of Stalin. And we know about the motivation behind *Guernica*, which unfortunately was not a part of the Guggenheim show as its relocation to Spain in the 1980s has precluded its traveling anywhere again. But we also know that there is no easier mantle to don nowadays than "politically conscious," and the current image of Picasso is more deeply grounded for the foreseeable future in an aura of creative individualism, of magisterial talent, misogyny, and titanic egoism. Frank Sinatra hung around with presidents and probably voted on occasion, but I am not likely to think of him as a political type, either. Furthermore, the imagery of war, torture, and loss often ends up—in flamboyant Modernist hands—really being about art and the artist, and not about those subjects, which are at least as difficult to tackle as the elusive ways of children.

That said, an examination of Picasso (even one that contained no surprises in the choice of paintings) from a period when his grisaille palette became especially severe and his figures particularly wrenching was hard not to like, in a superficial way, if only because it wasn't as adventurous or taxing as an immersion in the portraits or the intricacies of Cubism. *Girl Asleep at a Table* (1936), washed in grays, began the tour in an appropriately low-ceilinged, claustrophobic space beneath a naked light bulb connoting interrogation and deprivation, while the more stiff and "official" *Monument to the Spanish Who Died for France* (1945–1947) ended the show with a somber, if almost angry, stateliness. In between were a variety of moods and styles: explicit, as in *The Charnel House* (1945); macabre, as in the wonderful, brutal still-lifes with sheep skulls; the achingly human (the 1944 *Reclining Nude and Woman Washing her Feet*); and the oddly bright and joyous (the 1938 *Still Life with a Palette, Candlestick, and Head of a Minotaur*). *Night Fishing at Antibes* (1939), well known from the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art,

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raised the level of quality in the exhibition from the hit-or-miss to the canonical, and is every bit as eerie and apocalyptic as this context required. But then the personal and the sexual are never far from the surface with Picasso and never take a back seat to the stage of world events: the woman slurping her ice cream cone on the right—her head abstractly reduced to the shape of an erect penis—inclines us to think more about the artist's grinding private obsessions, his inventiveness and mean-spiritedness, than any political implications about searchlights in the night and hooked fish. And so it goes. Is *Cat Seizing a Bird* (1939) "ominous with political overtones" in a time of Fascism on the march, as the wall plaque notes? Or is the voraciousness of a feral cat a metaphor closer to home, to the studio and the bedroom? The creepy textures and nightmarish body parts of *Man With a Straw Hat Licking an Ice Cream Cone* (1938) and the shrieking *Supplicant* (1937) do speak more of bombings and an end to sensual ease, but they inevitably put us in mind of the genius who devised such an aggressive technique, a shadow that dwarfs any ostensible concern for Franco's tyranny and the spread of Nazism. Some artists express the spirit of their age (and that is often all they can do), and inevitably efface themselves to one degree or another in the process. Other artists are too large to do that and their connection to the plight of their times is more ambiguous.

The gallery near the base of the ramp reinforced this point with an historical display of material about France under the Nazis, which included photographs of German troops entering Paris and Resistance fighting in the streets, magazines, newsreels, and the German propaganda posters that were plastered on French walls during the Occupation. It is surely significant that nothing among the paintings outside filled me with the same outrage and dismay as did a poster from the eve of the Normandy landing depicting Napoleon as an ancestor and spiritual ally of the Nazis, attempting to keep the diabolical British (shown here in the form of a sea serpent adorned by a Star of David) from "invading" the Continent. In certain situations, dark reality and the twisting of truth that oppressed people have to live with is a subject too formidable and too raw for art.

Concurrent with the Picasso show, occupying three higher rungs of the spiral and a few side galleries of the Guggenheim, was a second demonstration of an artist's response to times of change and, simultaneously, a form of looking-inward. "Jim Dine: Walking Memory, 1959–1969" was another demonstration of art as a blending of chronicle and autobiography with an edge. Dine has always been categorized, simply and emphatically, as a Pop Artist, but the inadequacy of that label for him was vividly apparent in this survey of his work from the period that gave us Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha, and James Rosenquist. For Dine, pop culture, objects of everyday life, and the American mania for construction and commodities—for contraptions and hoarding—are fair themes, and there is something of the Pop Artist in him in his rejection of the "high art" ethos of Picasso, Matisse, and the Abstract Expression-

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ists. At the same time, though, an all-out embrace of mass-produced objects in and of themselves means rather little to Dine, and he has no use for Warhol's calculated lack of affect or the Pop desire to subvert traditional notions of meaning in modern art. If anything, there is an old-style poignancy to Jim Dine's work, which the Guggenheim show clearly articulated, as we absorb the art of a man who longs to make portraits and explore questions of identity and vocation, to luxuriate in paint and feel inspired by the physicality of sculpture, but feels—or knows—that those endeavors aren't going to yield much in a traditional vein. The wry, closet traditionalist in Dine was present, though, at the start of the show: his 1959 mini-version of *Winged Victory* in the Louvre is decked out in rags and a housecoat, but is nonetheless ready to soar.

Early in his career, which included staging anarchic performance pieces at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village and taking part in Happenings with artists like Allan Kaprow, Dine turned to clothing and tools as his most secure but highly charged materials, and many of those three-dimensional works still look fresh today. The face and the body may have become unpaintable circa 1959, but the outer emblems of male life—those means by which men are constrained, defined, known to the world—are eminently paintable, some literally. *Green Suit* is a corduroy suit itself, dangling from its hanger, torn at the legs and battle-weary with drips, streaks, and dots of paint. The 1961 *Tie* is encrusted with an inch of chokingly sweet orange pigment. The bathrobe and palette paintings (what quicker way to denote the stay-at-home artist?) introduce wires, chains, and axes attached to the canvas, hinting at a war between opposing ideas about manly pursuits. Nor do the identity conflicts end there: *Red Devil Color Chart No. 2* and *Self-Portrait Next to a Colored Window*, both from 1964, continue to withhold any trace of the artist in the flesh but evoke the image of a man torn between an exhausted legacy—the recent successes of color abstraction, an aesthete's love of paint-as-paint—and the fierce ironic stance toward that legacy that was a fact of life for Dine's generation. But parody and sarcasm, which came easy to his peers, is less simple or sustaining for Dine. For that matter, even when he enters a long-claimed turf like the bathroom or bedroom, realms drained of emotion and drama by Tom Wesselmann, the spirit of his assemblages is his own. The real mirror, towel rack, and toilet paper in *Double Red Bathroom* (1962) or the Popeye doll, play guns, and trains attached to *Three Panel Study for a Child's Room* (1964) from the Menil Collection are neither lurid nor deadpan. They seem to be hinting at reworked memories, bits of dream life, clues to personality slipping away; they feel like fragments of stories from a context that won't validate narrative or even obvious symbolism.

At moments, Jim Dine came across in this show as exuberantly anti-Pop, or anti-Warhol & Co., to be precise. Feeling is close to the surface; excitement, nervousness, remembrance, a wish to know himself, a horror of tidiness, a relish for object-making, and a wish to communicate with an audience, however indirectly, are part of the package with

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Dine, and that is why even at his weakest, he avoids the sterility that sometimes overtakes the mass-production side of Pop. (The Roy Lichtenstein retrospective at this same museum a few years ago was a much flatter, grimmer experience.) He can be glib, especially in the late 1960s pieces—*Nancy and I at Ithaca (Straw Heart)* is two steps from a Hallmark card, and the transcription onto canvas of the names of all of his acquaintances in *Name Painting* is awkward and juvenile—but, at his best, Dine knew what he was about when he left Ohio for the Village, and that is especially true when his topics are uncertainty and troubled, energized reflection.

The growth of museums in late twentieth-century America has done more than the obvious (e.g., increasing the size of art audiences, enriching museum coffers and enabling them to mount more lavish shows); it has also changed the contours of art history itself. One feature of rapid museum expansion has been the need to "discover" and "rediscover" neglected talents, both in the interests of serious canon revision and—no less important a factor—to keep the admission turnstiles whirling. It is a project that involves not only multicultural artists overlooked in our own century (artists like William H. Johnson come to mind), but men and women from the ranks of the much-studied past. I suppose it is inevitable that such an enterprise takes on a life of its own after a while, filling those ample exhibition schedules by excavating major and minor work alike—while having to pretend it is all major. Sometimes this strategy bears fruit. The Lorenzo Lotto show at the National Gallery of Art a few years ago rightly raised his profile, and textbooks and college courses studying the Renaissance in decades to come will be obliged to include Lotto more than they had in the past. The need to make much of Dosso Dossi (1486–1542), subject of a recent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, is a good deal less certain.

One sign of trouble was apparent only three steps into the galleries showcasing "Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara." A single portrait hung in the first room with the huge wall-plaque introductions to the artist and court life among the Este dukes of Ferrara. The picture was of Dossi's patron, Duke Alfonso I, in all his muscular glory and patrician rectitude. By far the strongest, most glittering portrait in the show, it is also not by Dossi. The attribution reads "After Titian." A room near the end of the show contains portraits of soldiers, all of disputed attribution. Indeed, basing a judgment on those works we know are his, it turns out that Dossi was often far from competent when it came to the realistic depiction of the figure—nobleman, saint, or Roman deity. Small wonder that Vasari's praise was reserved for Dossi's landscape skills. (To be specific: some good calves and thighs were to be seen on the walls at the Met, but one had to struggle through an enormous number of log-like limbs and glazed, puffy faces in this too-large show. Trees, clouds, hills, and towns in the distance are rendered with a great deal more assurance.) That Ludovico

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Ariosto, author of *Orlando Furioso*, a book that provided Dossi with some of his juiciest illustrative material, saw him as an equal to Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, and Titian is nothing short of unfathomable today.

On the other hand, Dosso Dossi is of interest—and worthy of an exhibition—if we see him not as a newly discovered master, but as an exemplar of certain aspects of Renaissance culture, not the least of which is a potent vein of eccentricity, a quirkiness that is both literary and temperamental. He was often drawn to the most delightfully weird characters and scenes. There aren't any sedentary noblewomen or quiet scholars in this body of work: from *Melissa* (1515), a more benevolent Circe-type from *Orlando Furioso*, in the second gallery to *Hercules Among the Pygmies* (1535) in the last, the emphasis is on action, power, energy, combativeness, incongruity, and even shock value. He also demonstrates as well as anyone else the paradoxical interest Renaissance Italians had in pagan mythology and Christian worship. Dossi's *Saint George* (1513) is appealingly moody and his 1528 *Saint Jerome* has an emaciated intensity (another version of the holy hermit is a bit too well-fed), but the ego-driven escapades of the gods, goddesses, heroes, and nymphs were Dossi's true source of inspiration, and for sheer irreverent zaniness, it would be hard to beat *Jupiter, Mercury, and Virtue* (1524)—in which Virtue is being told to take a hike; Fortune rules the world—or *Allegory of Hercules* (1542), depicting the hero past his sexual prime, still trying to impress the smirking ladies with his wrinkled muscles. The last gallery of the exhibition, which contained the two Hercules pictures, also displayed *The Battle of Orlando and Rodomonte* (1530) in which Ludovico Ariosto's irate protagonist wrestles nude with a clothed opponent before a forcefully painted and highly complex landscape background. The colors are rich; the drawing is crisp. Yet we are immediately brought back to the problem in the entrance gallery: this painting is by Dossi's brother, Battista, and several of the paintings in the room are considered collaborations between the two. The case for establishing Dossi as "among the most alluring of all north Italian painters of the generation following Giorgione" is a shaky one at every turn. The imprimatur of the Met doesn't quite carry it off.

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BERT CARDULLO

# Suicide Is Painless

I WON'T BE DISCUSSING STEVEN SPIELBERG'S *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* or Terrence Malick's *Thin Red Line* in this column, for I have come to believe about military combat—particularly the fighting in World War II—what many Jews believe about the Holocaust: that to depict or enact it, to *fake* it on screen, no matter how good one's intentions, is a kind of sacrilege. I don't know why two such big-budget epics about the Second World War have been produced at this time, particularly since a spate of similar pictures, replete with stars from the leads down to the cameos, appeared during the sixties and seventies, from *The Longest Day* (1962) to *A Bridge Too Far* (1977). Perhaps *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* exist because never before have filmmakers been able to make violence look so real on screen.

Malick typically wants to aestheticize, even spiritualize, the infantryman's experience of combat on Guadalcanal (just as he aestheticized sheer violence in *Badlands* [1973]), however realistic his depiction of it may otherwise be; while Spielberg, for his part, typically wishes to sentimentalize the act of going to or being at war, if not American troops' storming of Normandy beach itself. Both men probably think that they are serving history, but (1) history has already been cinematically served in the instances of Normandy and Guadalcanal; (2) the screen may in fact not be the best place on which to serve history, given film's need, at best, to condense and dramatize, at worst to distort and sensationalize; and (3) I for one don't need any history lessons about World War II, having been fathered by a veteran who was disabled for life by his own experience of battle on Guadalcanal, and having lost one uncle to Normandy together with another to Iwo Jima.

Perhaps young people today, as well as those not so young but equally immature, are fascinated by movies like *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* because the noble concept of self-sacrifice is so foreign to them. (And make no mistake: it is the self-sacrificial nature of war movies, their showcasing of selfless valor, that makes the good ones so profoundly moving to those who can sit through the make-believe carnage.) Equally foreign to American movie audiences is the concept of self-sacrifice as intended by the suicidal, but not terminally ill, protagonist of Abbas Kiarostami's *A Taste of Cherry*. This is not a film to which audiences will be flocking, however, for it has no (American) stars, it comes from Iran, and some thought actually went into the making of it. Furthermore, its sense of place has nothing to do with groundless spectacle but every-

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thing to do with aesthetic grounding, with the visual communication of feeling and idea. And maybe this is the real quarrel I have with bloodshed in combat films: less that it's feigned than that it is spectacular for its own sake, just because it could be, like the action-cum-setting of so many bad American pictures.

Well, Kiarostami doesn't make "action" pictures, and a sense of place is crucial to all the films of this, one of the most esteemed of contemporary Iranian directors. The village of Koker in northwestern Iran, for instance—specifically an undulating hillside there—unites the pictures in Kiarostami's loose trilogy presenting a documentary-style look at life in this region of the country before and after the devastating earthquake of June 1990: *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987), *And Life Goes On* (1992), and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994). Possibly the fifty-eight-year-old Kiarostami's concern with place derives from his making of several documentaries about school children, in all of which non-fictional location, rather than fictional narrative, comprises the motivating foundation for everything that we see and hear.

Even the first of Kiarostami's fiction films, a short titled *Bread and Alley* (1970), reveals this director's predilection for place. Its story, about a boy and a minatory dog, is anecdotally slight, but the way in which the camera observes and negotiates the labyrinthine alleyways of central Tehran is visually telling. Numerous Iranian movies have such child protagonists; indeed, Kiarostami wrote the script for the most recent Iranian film to reach these shores, Jafar Panahi's *White Balloon* (1995), about a seven-year-old girl's quest through Tehran to purchase a goldfish. No, Iranian filmmakers are not obsessed with children for their own sake (as, one could argue, Truffaut was); they are trying to avoid the minefield of Islamic restrictions on the portrayal of adult male-female relationships. With children, of course—especially boys—few restrictions are at issue.

What is at issue in the censorship-bound Iranian cinema, however, even in films featuring children—whom Iranian *auteurs*, like the Italian neorealists before them, use partly as emblems of innocence in a world under internal as well as external siege—is sociopolitical criticism or moral-philosophical speculation. Each film must be approved both in screenplay-form and in the final cut by the Islamic government; furthermore, cast and crews themselves are vetted for political and religious correctness. Which leads us to a discussion of Kiarostami's latest picture, *A Taste of Cherry*, one almost blocked from export by the Iranian authorities because of its subject, suicide. Islamic law not only prohibits suicide, it also forbids even discussion of this topic! Yet somehow *A Taste of Cherry*, which Kiarostami wrote, directed, *and* edited, made it to the 1997 Cannes Festival, where it became the first film from Iran to be awarded the Palme d'Or.

Although its subject is suicide, *A Taste of Cherry* has a theme in common with both *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees*: the struggle of life against death, or death against life. And Kiarostami's

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most recent work, like all his previous films, documentaries and fictional ones alike, acknowledges the means of its own creation. Some commentators see Kiarostami's acknowledgment of the artifice of filmmaking, together with his blurring of the line between documentary and fiction in such a picture as *Close-Up* (1990), as nothing more than an obsessive directorial conceit that is didactic, manipulative, and by now—after over half a century of literary as well as cinematic homage to Brecht's theory of distancing—otiose. I see this director's cinematic self-reference, however, as something more, and more profound: as his way of questioning, in so repressive a society as Iran's, the truth not merely of the government's pronouncements and propaganda, but also of his own fictions and documentaries, of the very act of creating or chronicling, reshaping or recording. And nowhere is Kiarostami's self-doubting authorship more appropriate than in *A Taste of Cherry*, for this is a movie concerned with individual self-doubt, self-ridicule, self-loathing, or just plain self-weariness so powerful that it would lead to self-annihilation.

Mr. Badii, a middle-aged man with dark eyes, bruise-colored lips, a powerful forehead, and magnificent nostrils, drives slowly around the hilly outskirts of northeastern Tehran in his white Range Rover, searching for someone to assist him in his plan to commit suicide. He will pay good money—200,000 tomans—if someone of his choosing will return the next morning to a prearranged spot in these hills—a hole by the side of the road—and either pull him out if he is still alive or shovel dirt onto his body if he is dead.[1] Mr. Badii, it becomes clear, is going to swallow a bottle of sleeping pills, lie down in that hole, and await the result. Though he wants to commit the ultimate act of self-isolation, he also wants to be buried—or not buried, he explains, if he is unconscious but not dead—a social nicety that paradoxically will require his participation in one final human relationship. In *A Taste of Cherry* the figure of the accomplice is naturally a device used to give dramatic form to a moral-philosophical argument, except that here that argument is not so simple. Indeed, Mr. Badii never quite tells us, mysteriously, why he wants to commit suicide or what his problem with existence is, beyond briefly alluding once to unhappiness, once to tiredness, and once to a propensity for hurting other people.

We first see him in profile, in close-up, soberly driving past a crowd of unemployed laborers who are waiting for any kind of work. But Mr. Badii shakes his head and moves on until he overhears a young man in a telephone booth complaining about a shortage of money. He offers this fellow a lift and financial help, but the latter refuses, as does another man who collects plastic bags and bottles from the countryside. Still we do not know Mr. Badii's name or his reason for soliciting these men, as the film pauses to roll its minimal credits. Under them, we continue to

[1] Compare his plan with that of the central figures in Vycheslav Kristofovich's *A Friend of the Deceased* (1997) and Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* (1998) to have a hit man knock them off—a device borrowed from Aki Kaurismäki's 1990 film *I Hired a Contract Killer*.

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hear the sounds of the searching Range Rover but no music, of which there will be none until the coda or epilogue.

What we do know, at this point, is the nature of the place in which *A Taste of Cherry* transpires. Kiarostami clearly shot the picture in autumn to take advantage of the metaphorical significance of the season of dying. The hills outside Tehran are therefore parched, the grass dead or sunburned, and everything the cinematographer Homayoun Payvar's camera shoots seems yellow-brown: the dirt mounds, dirt roads, and ditches, the dusty air, even the occasional tree or bush. The sun has been here, but this is not a sunny place; the weather may not be cold but the subject is chilly enough; the sky is mostly overcast, the atmosphere polluted, the light flat, and the evening shadows long. We seem to be in an underdeveloped industrial wasteland that features piled-up pipes, a sporadic derrick or water tower, rock piles, abandoned cars, forlorn phone lines, and halted building construction. The only moving vehicles we see besides Mr. Badii's Range Rover are a few tractors and dump trucks, which appear to move dirt from one excavation site to another in a travesty of purposeful human activity. The only color we can detect in the landscape besides yellow-brown is gray-green; the only sound we hear, apart from that of human voices and motorized vehicles, is the momentary chirping of a few birds.

This is a place, you would think—at best inchoate and haphazard, at worst desolate and colorless—that might drive anyone to commit suicide, or at least to drive here in order to do it, but Mr. Badii is the only man we observe who has a death wish. And he is the main character among a cast of characters made up almost exclusively of men, most of them displaced persons or menial laborers in contrast with the well-heeled Badii. There is only one female in *A Taste of Cherry*, and she's among the extras—almost certainly because of the Islamic restrictions on the use of women in motion pictures. But it's tempting to speculate, from a Western point of view, that Mr. Badii's loss of direction in life may have something to do with the absence of the female principle from his world, not to speak of the absence of children. Moreover, as Mr. Badii's Range Rover negotiates yet another curve or passes through one more hollow in the terrain, we get the feeling that he is going in circles, and thus that the parabolic loop of his automobile is meant to parody the linear or progressive genre of the road movie.

That parabolic loop—or this narrative parable—really begins with the first man who accepts a ride in Mr. Badii's Range Rover, in the front seat of which most of *A Taste of Cherry* will take place, most of it in medium, shot-reverse-shot between Badii and each of his interlocutors. Such a shooting style, separating the characters in their own frames, is entirely appropriate to the theme of the film, for Mr. Badii has already made the decision to separate himself from this world and the three men he propositions are, each in his own way, isolated or estranged from Iranian society. That first one is a shy young Kurdish conscript, on the way back to his military barracks at five o'clock in the afternoon; a farmer back

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home, he seems to know almost no one in Tehran and shows no sign of having acclimated himself to army life. Yet it is to this man that the protagonist first reveals his name and his underlying purpose. And it is with this soldier's entrance into *A Taste of Cherry* that we get our initial look at Mr. Badii's Range Rover from the outside, in the first of several bird's-eye-view shots that diminish the size of all those who would traverse Tehran's expansive hill country. But despite the fact that 200,000 tomans equal six months of a soldier's pay, the Kurd refuses to participate in Mr. Badii's suicide plan. Scared and confused, he runs away when the Range Rover stops at the would-be gravesite.

Undeterred, Mr. Badii drives on, watching the world, or eyeing the countryside, from one remove: through the screen or protective barrier of his windshield. After he stops at an idle cement plant, he again looks at the world through a screen, in this case the windows of the plant's watchtower; and we ourselves watch Mr. Badii in medium long shot through the movie screen, which identifies us with him even when the camera is not literally identifying us with his point of view. Here, with the same ulterior motive as before, he offers a ride to someone visiting the plant's lone security guard—to an Afghani student at an Islamic seminary who admits to feeling at loose ends in Iran. This seminarian agrees to take a drive with Mr. Badii and thus becomes the second individual to be propositioned. But he, too, refuses to play any role in Mr. Badii's suicide plan. Instead, the seminarian quotes from the Koran the standard Islamic injunctions against suicide—doubtless sincerely but undoubtedly without effect, for Mr. Badii does not end his quest to find an accomplice in self-murder.

He finds that person in Mr. Bagheri, an older, Turkish man who works as a taxidermist at a natural history museum. Unlike the Kurdish soldier and the Afghani seminarian, this Turkish taxidermist is ruminative and talkative: he tells a joke, relates a story, even sings a song. Furthermore, Mr. Bagheri almost immediately agrees to do what Mr. Badii asks, because he needs the money to help his sickly child; but then he tries to talk the Iranian out of suicide by talking about the joys of life and nature. At one point the taxidermist asks what for him is a rhetorical question, but for which Mr. Badii has long since had the unorthodox answer. "You want to give up the taste of cherries?" Mr. Bagheri inquires, and it is the mark of Kiarostami's subtlety that this question gives the picture its title. For it comes, not out of nowhere, but, still, almost as an aside. Yet Kiarostami showcases the singular object of this question in his title, which is a metaphorical way of "privileging" not only the dailiness of daily life, but also the pleasurable potency of the chance remark, the spontaneous gesture, the anticlimactic action, or the random encounter that may come out of such life.[2]

[2] For similar titles and thematic preoccupations, see such films as *A Hen in the Wind* (1948), *The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice* (1952), and *Twilight in Tokyo* (1957) by the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu.

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Mr. Bagheri thinks that the Iranian's mind is his problem, not the world itself; that Mr. Badii must change his outlook on the world—his screen on it, if you will—if the world is to change its look for him. Like the soldier and the seminarian before him, however, Mr. Bagheri himself hasn't been asking many questions. He has been volubly responding to Mr. Badii's queries about the suitability as well as agreeability of his passenger to the moribund task at hand, as if it were the taxidermist's, and, to a lesser extent, the other two men's thoughts and feelings that *A Taste of Cherry* wished to elicit more than anything else. That Mr. Bagheri in addition tells jokes or stories to reveal his analysis of Mr. Badii's problem, and neither the Kurd not the Afghani even attempts such a metaphorical analysis, are subtle indications that, as members of a lower social class, all three lack the moral authority to question their superior. Such lack of inquisitional authority, of course, partly explains why we don't discover Mr. Badii's reasons for wanting to end his life.

As twilight approaches, and right after Mr. Bagheri has sung a song about the virtue of friendship, Mr. Badii drops the taxidermist off at the natural history museum, where his accomplice optimistically avows that, the following morning, he will pull a living Mr. Badii out of his makeshift grave. We see Mr. Bagheri at work here—or rather we see Mr. Badii see him through the windows of a museum shop—showing students how to stuff and mount a quail, just as, not long before, we had seen Mr. Badii perform a roughly analogous act of "immortalization" by agreeing to take the picture of a young couple along the side of a road. In the subsequent interlude—worthy of Antonioni at his best in the coda of *L'Eclisse* (1962)—we see Mr. Badii outside his car, and for once he is neither looking at the world through a screen nor looking down at the earth in which he would be covered up. He looks up to see a jet stream, turns to observe some children playing, watches a man just sitting on a bench, then himself sits on a hillside and looks out at Tehran in the distance.

After *A Taste of Cherry*'s first cross-fade, we next find ourselves looking at Mr. Badii for the duration of a long, nighttime take through the picture window of his Tehran apartment, as he paces back and forth seemingly in mental agony. A taxi honks its horn from the street, the lights in the apartment go out, and Mr. Badii leaves to be driven to his designated grave in the hills as a thunderstorm approaches. The last time we see Mr. Badii, he is looking up at the camera from a supine position in the ground. As the moon retreats behind the clouds and rain begins to fall, the screen fades to black on his face and remains black for quite some time.

Finally morning comes, but there's been a cinematographic change: the image we see, of the place where Mr. Badii had lain down to die, is presented in that grainy texture filmmakers use to give us the idea we are looking at a TV screen. Then we see a film crew on the hillside, in the midst of their work shooting a group of soldiers who march in the

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background; we pick out the actor who plays Mr. Badii as he walks around out-of-character; and we even observe Kiarostami himself shouting that "the shoot is over." An instrumental version of the Dixieland tune "St. James Infirmary"—a mainstay of the New Orleans jazz funeral—subsequently begins to play on the soundtrack as the conscripts rest by the roadside, the crew prepares to return to Tehran, and, in the very last shot, Mr. Badii's Range Rover drives off into the distance.

Did Mr. Badii die of the overdose of sleeping pills? Did he even take the pills, since we don't see him do so? Did Mr. Bagheri arrive either to bury or resuscitate Mr. Badii? We do not know, or rather Kiarostami does not tell us. His character is in search of an author, and that author is the movie audience, with whom Mr. Badii has been identified because, to repeat, his looking at life through screens or barriers mimics the very experience of watching a film. In this open ending in which the questions are left hanging, *we* must make the life-and-death decision, and whatever we decide will be a measure of our own sensibility—not Kiarostami's or Mr. Badii's. For I believe, as I implied earlier, that one of this author-director's missions is to free the audience—particularly an Iranian one—to think and decide for itself, especially about taboo subjects like suicide. Kiarostami is no reader-response theorist or aesthetic relativist: he's a species of existential philosopher trapped inside an autocratic theocracy, an Ingmar Bergman of the Islamic world, if you will, whose camera would represent reality at the same time as it exposes the means of its representation.

Included in that representation is the work of non-actors, whom Kiarostami prefers to use both because they are less theatrical or self-dramatizing—and therefore more realistic—than professionals, and because they are more manipulable or moldable—hence less resistant to this *auteur*'s formalistic designs. To wit, the chief (non)actors in *A Taste of Cherry*—Homayoun Ershadi (Mr. Badii), Abdolhossein Bagheri (Mr. Bagheri), Safar Ali Moradi (the Kurdish soldier), and Mir Hossein Nouri (the Afghani seminarian)—did not work with each other in the scenes in which we see them. Although most of the picture takes place in the front seat of Mr. Badii's Range Rover, as he drives and converses with one passenger after another, the two segments of each sequence—the driver's contribution to the dialogue, on the one hand, and the passenger's, on the other—were filmed separately. Serendipitously, such a method calls for a shot-reverse-shot editing style that, as I've already indicated, is thematically apt here. But one has to conclude that Kiarostami's prime reason for using this (invisible) split-screen device, like Godard and Bresson before him, was to guard against acting in the conventional sense—acting, that is, that causes actors to fall out of tune with the world around the shot, and that by its very self-exhibition would lend a self-importance to this film's characters which they themselves do not possess.

So different, in fact, is *A Taste of Cherry*—not only in acting style but also in directorial signature, physical milieu, metaphysical ambiance,

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and thematic import (not to speak of its own deployment of soldiers)—from the American war movies I mentioned at the start of this chronicle, that one could describe Kiarostami's film as an implicit argument against their very inflated, illusionistic, even disingenuous existence. For, despite the self-sacrificial nature of such pictures at their best, they are always in danger of crossing, and frequently do cross, the thin red line that separates life from death, the sensuous taste of cherries from the senseless spilling of blood, the selfless exaltation of human grace from the selfish exploitation of bestial violence. And Abbas Kiarostami is ever watching them.

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DEAN FLOWER

# Nature Does Not Exist for Us

ONE TRAIT OF CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL WRITERS is their love of excerpts. They dote upon the eloquent epigraph. They love to quote mottoes and snippets from one another—and to rummage through the wisdom of the ancients as well. Ann Zwinger likes to quote pithy bits from Edward Abbey. Terry Tempest Williams prefaces *Refuge* with a poem by Mary Oliver. Barry Lopez quotes everyone from Eskimo seal-hunters to Melville and Montaigne. Wendell Berry goes back to Shakespeare, to the *Odyssey*, to Hesiod. And sooner or later they *all* quote Thoreau—who, after all, wrote as if he meant to be excerpted, and "pawed over the ancients" (as Ezra Pound once put it) with the best of them. Naturally I find myself predisposed to do the same:

> We need the tonic of wildness,—to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. . . . We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.
>
> —Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854

> The screech-owl I can imagine on my wrist, also the delicate saw-whet that flies like a big soft moth down by Great Pond. And I can imagine sitting quietly before that luminous wanderer the snowy owl, and learning, from the white gleam of its feathers, something about the Arctic. But the great horned [owl] I can't imagine in any such proximity—if one of those should touch me, it would be to the center of my life, and I must fall. They are the pure wild hunters of our world.
>
> —Mary Oliver, "Owls," 1995

> For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.
>
> —Henry Beston, *The Outermost House*, 1928

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> We are one among millions of species, stewards of nothing. By what argument could we, arising just a geological microsecond ago, become responsible for the affairs of a world 4.5 billion years old, teeming with life that has been evolving and diversifying for at least three-quarters of this immense span. Nature does not exist for us, had no idea we were coming, and doesn't give a damn about us.
>
> —Stephen Jay Gould, "The Golden Rule," 1993

Isolating such passages turns them into scripture, I suppose, and suggests they deserve a special reverence. But I think environmental writers nowadays appreciate such utterances not so much because they preach or scold or issue solemn warnings, but because they can be used as coordinates. They remind us of where and how we are placed. They give us our bearings.

My conscious reason for choosing these excerpts was simply that I liked them. And then they seemed to me to serve somehow as touchstones for what I find valuable in the welter of contemporary writing about nature and the environment, writing that strives to do something more than just argue the issues of wilderness, ecology, conservation, threatened species, global warming, pollution, land management, or green politics. Take the Thoreau passage, for example. It is about the need for hearing and seeing and smelling the wild so that we may *witness* our own limits, and see them *transgressed*—a startling word—as if violated or trampled upon. The other passages, I now recognize, are equally about limits. Mary Oliver's respect for owls grades into abject fear, another way of acknowledging what Henry Beston so memorably calls the "other nations" of earth—all those animal kingdoms whose sovereignty we routinely ignore. And Stephen Jay Gould issues a healthy reminder of our place in geological history, one that should save any environmentalist from sentimentality or illusions of grandeur. In different contexts David Brower and Loren Eiseley have said virtually the same thing, but I like the transgressive bluntness of Gould's language. Nature does not exist *for* us? How easily we sit here, breathing in and out, assuming the opposite.

With such coordinates as these in mind I turn to some recent work in the heavily-tilled field of nature writing. What looks especially good? One of the most self-consciously literary is John Elder's *Reading the Mountains of Home*.[1] Elder conducts a series of hikes into the mountains around his home in the village of Bristol, Vermont, using Robert Frost's famous poem "Directive" (1946) both as an evocative map (Frost lived in nearby Ripton from 1938 until his death in 1963 and knew the area well) and as a spiritual guide; in fact, the poem structures Elder's whole experience. Here again is the device of the eloquent epigraph, taken

[1] READING THE MOUNTAINS OF HOME, by *John Elder*. Harvard University Press. $22.95.

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about as far is it can go. The poem epitomizes the landscape, and is in turn deciphered by it. Elder locates his project in the company of Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), Scott Russell Sanders' *Staying Put* (1993), Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge* (1992) and Ann Zwinger's *Beyond the Aspen Grove* (1970), with the examples of Wendell Berry on his Kentucky farm and Henry Thoreau staying put at Walden hovering nearby. Elder classifies these books as "topographical" writing: "a deeply rooted tradition of books devoted to evoking in great detail the physical and cultural character of a beloved place." The idea comes from Thoreau, who said he gained strength like Antaeus by keeping his feet on the ground.

But is that where Elder's feet are? He lavishes enough attention on Frost's poem to make it the "beloved place" quite as much as his mountains of home. A professor of English and Environmental Studies at Middlebury College, Elder is the editor (with Robert Finch) of *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* (1990) and the author of a book about nature poetry, *Imagining the Earth* (1985). Not surprisingly, therefore, when he studies his own landscape he finds layer after layer of text, in fact a multiplicity of narrative configurations beneath his own immediate experience. The reality of Bristol Cliffs is confirmed by Frost's poem ("The chisel work of an enormous Glacier / That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole") and then reconstructed from the geological record. The vagaries of local history are also inscribed in the landscape—abandoned roads, crumbling foundations, the melancholy reminders of all-too-recent failure. These too are found in "Directive," then traced in the town annals, graveyards, and personal narratives. Below that are the dim records of the native Abenaki tribes who were displaced, without a qualm apparently, by Ethan Allen and his likes. Even Bristol's open meadows and hummocky hillsides, its second-growth woods and aging apple trees, tell their stories of biological succession and human intervention. Frost knew more about "the cycles of plant succession," says Elder, than any other American poet—perhaps forgetting that Thoreau, no mean poet, wrote "The Sucession of Forest Trees" in 1860.

Woven into all these texts is Elder's account of his own life, his origins and family, his neighbors and community, the death of his father, the spiritual directive he seeks both in Frost's poem and in his mountain hikes. He would "Drink and be whole again beyond confusion." But I think he is defeated by his own conscientiousness. Nothing about this landscape comes without a map, an inscription, a burdensome history. Soon you begin to feel vaguely oppressed. Elder is not a visual writer, not a botanizer; he is a reader of texts. But there are too many texts in his mountains, too many narrative skeins, too many inscriptions. Which text does he really make his own? Perhaps he admires Frost's great poem too much; its language means more to him, apparently, than any actual rocks and stones and trees. Or perhaps he is too conscious of his literary debts. He quotes Ammons, Berry, Carson, De Voto, Emerson, and so on

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through a whole alphabet of allusions, until everything seems mediated by other texts.

Elder comes closest to escaping this oppressive self-consciousness in his final chapter, where he takes his son Matthew on a canoe trip. The trouble is that Dad has labored all winter in making this canoe in memory of *his* father. It's called, with heavy emphasis, "The Tribute," and seems a calculated reference to the unfinished sheepfold in Wordsworth's father-son poem, "Michael." In fact Elder has replayed that family scenario on an actual "pilgrimage to Grasmere" two summers before. Now on the anniversary of his father's death, he wants to paddle "The Tribute" down the rapids of the New Haven River, with his glum fifteen-year-old Matthew, who has been seriously depressed. What comes next is probably the best moment in the book. Father and son are ignominiously thrown into the drink when the canoe capsizes. They surrender to a mighty confusion of water and rock, luckily escaping injury. All of Elder's texts and allusions, for the moment at least, get washed away. He seems utterly happy and at ease in nature for the first time. Not even a strained reference to Constable's *The Hay-Wain* mars the equanimity of this moment. He concludes with a wonderful justice, re-writing Frost's last line, "It is always confusion we drink." Too bad Elder could not allow himself to do that more often.

Ann Zwinger operates at the other extreme. She likes finding occasional texts that echo and confirm her experience of the desert, but that experience always comes first. Writing about the canyons of southwestern Utah in *Wind in the Rock* (1978), she explains:

> There is nothing vicarious or secondhand about walking there; instead, I have an exhilarating sense of immediacy. I'm not watching it or reading about it, I'm here, right *now*, experiencing it. When I crawl up a sandstone wall, plastered against its abrasive curve; when I heave myself onto the top rim to see a view of such splendor that wonder washes away all my apprehension about getting back down; when I do what I knew I could not do—then I have a heady taste of glory.

You feel at once the way her language *fits* those rocks and sings the pleasure of her experience. She has now written or edited more than twenty books, all of them the products of fieldwork and research. Like Mary Austin and Edward Abbey before her she relishes being alone in arid places, and has an eye for endlessly entrancing details. Her latest book's title, *The Nearsighted Naturalist*, wryly identifies the "nose-close" role she likes to play.[2] A collection of essays written between 1972 and 1996, it provides a better introduction to her work than, say, *The*

[2] THE NEARSIGHTED NATURALIST, by *Ann Haymond Zwinger*. University of Arizona Press. $19.95p.

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*Mysterious Lands* (1989), where her nose-close detailing of the four great desert regions of America can be exhausting.

But the essays are deft, understated responses to a wide array of places, ranging from Indiana where she was born, to the Colorado Rockies and Baja California, to remote islands off the coast of Chile and New Zealand, even to the gorges of the Yangtze in China. Zwinger risks a little more metaphor here than she does elsewhere, but her eye is always exact. Describing her impulse to pick up pebbles on a beach, she reminds me of Elizabeth Bishop's bird in "Sandpiper" focused so intently on grains of sand:

> They are reminders of a natural world that grinds everything down to size. Some the sea shatters and breaks, some it makes beautiful, some it just gives up on. There is an aesthetic pleasure here, and an athletic one in bending and stretching; an intellectual pleasure in trying to figure out the physics of pebbles, the puzzle of tides, the working out of a set of pebbled values that depends upon rock and place and time.

This is fine-grained prose indeed, giving the shape and rhythm of her meditations as well as their metaphoric subtlety. Bishop comes to mind again in "A Cave with a View," an essay about spending a week alone on the island where Alexander Selkirk ("Robinson Crusoe") was shipwrecked in 1704. Neither Zwinger nor Bishop (in "Crusoe in England") is interested in Defoe's fictional invention; they respond instead to Selkirk's actual history, especially his memorable words, "Never have I been so happy as when I lived on my little island." Unlike Bishop who hears depths of melancholy in that line, Zwinger uses it to express her delight. Her essay is a diary of discovery, fascination, curiosity, piercing intensities. The soil is "dark as roasted coffee beans," the foliage "green as life," and the quiet so perfect "I fancy I can hear a crab sneeze."

Integral to the text of *The Nearsighted Naturalist* (and many of her other books) are Zwinger's beautifully precise pencil drawings—of wasps and whelks and anemones and all kinds of botanical specimens. Drawing, as she explains in "Drawing on Experience," enables "the pleasures of focusing outward": "I think of it as seeing what I did not see before, of discovering, of walking around in the stamens and the pistil, of pacing off the petals, of touching the plant and knowing who it is." It is interesting to trace the interdependence of drawing and writing in Zwinger's essays. On a trip up the Yangtze to see the fabulous gorges that will soon be dammed and flooded, for example, Zwinger documents the rare struggle of Chinese environmentalists against their government's project—a clear technological disaster-in-the-making. Then she begins to sketch the beautiful gorges themselves, terraced and labyrinthine slopes, ancient groves of apple and orange and persimmon alongside the "singing Irish green" of rice paddies, and the whole becomes a beautiful tapestry garden "embroidered on the landscape with French knots and satin and feather stitches . . . " But soon the metaphors give

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out, and although she has her sketchpad open and her "pen poised an inch above the page," she cannot go on:

> A pen line seems too coarse, too stringent, to limn the tangled terraces and the fine complex patterns. . . . Drawing, which usually gives me so much pleasure, now disheartens me. Now I understand why the Chinese use brush and wash to capture this soft, gentle blending of forms.

At such moments where fact verges upon metaphor, and crowded detail dissolves into pure abstraction, Zwinger proves herself a fine artist indeed.

That desire to fit words to an actual landscape, to make words constitute the very experience of that landscape, may be what lifts mere essays about places—"topographical writing," as John Elder calls it—to the level of poetry. But there's another vital ingredient involved, suggested by Zwinger's phrase "focusing outward." How may a conscientious environmental writer position herself (or himself) disinterestedly? For a naturalist or a writer, is there such a thing as "innocent intervention" in a landscape? Can the selfish ego be kept out of it, and modern technology held at bay? What ecological balance is possible for us, or is it all too late? Ever since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), our best environmental writers have been driven by a sense of moral urgency in trying to answer such questions. You hear it in Wendell Berry's savage critique of "agribusiness" in *The Unsettling of America* (1977), in Leslie Silko's apocalyptic vision of atomic disaster in *Ceremony* (1977), in Edward Abbey's anti-establishment wrath in *Desert Solitaire* (1968). But no writer today carries on that tradition more vigorously than Barry Lopez.

Ever since *Of Wolves and Men* (1978) rescued a whole species headed for extinction, Lopez has spoken for oppressed populations, both animal and human. He has listened to the wisdom embedded in Native American myths and legends, and sought to preserve it in his own stories. In *Arctic Dreams* (1986), he studied the complex ecology of the Arctic, from the seals and polar bears and Eskimos who dwell in it to the blundering explorers and modern researchers who do not—but harm it nevertheless. Some of his more recent writing has taken on an apocalyptic fervor, like *The Rediscovery of North America* (1990), a radical critique of the standard fictions about Columbus. But his latest book is subtler and better than that.[3] *About This Life* is a sequence of essays arranged to suggest the outlines of an autobiography. Characteristically, however, Lopez is more interested in his representative experience than in his own individuality. He makes of himself a lens through which he

[3] ABOUT THIS LIFE: Journeys on the Threshold of Memory, by *Barry Lopez*. Alfred A. Knopf. $24.00.

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can examine many different geographies, some remote and some very close to home. If he has an underlying theme, it is not staying put but displacement.

The book opens with a series of five essays set in exotic places like Northern Hokkaido, the Galápagos, and Antarctica, but the best one is called "Flight" and is set virtually nowhere. It describes the international air freight industry, in fascinating detail. Lopez took an extended series of flights on huge 747-400 cargo planes which carry commodities all over the world. He flew from Chicago to Tokyo and Amsterdam to Capetown, from Sydney to Singapore and Rome to New York. He talked to pilots and navigators, he learned what each plane carried—wristwatches, tractor parts, computers, high-fashion clothing, coffins, tropical fish, tennis shoes, basketballs, sunglasses, thoroughbred horses—anything and everything: "What planes fly, generally," says Lopez, "is what people imagine they want. Right now." He tells of flying nonstop for hours on end, sleeping, and then flying again, until time zones become a blur and time itself drains of meaning. In one case he flew in the same plane for fifty-six hours, through five crew changes. The point, when at last Lopez comes to it, is stunning in its simplicity—what is all this enterprise and extraordinary technology *for*?

> I watch the pallets go aboard. These, I have come to understand, are the goods. This lovely, shrieking behemoth, the apotheosis of modern imagination and invention, is being filled yet again with what we believe in. I watch, as agnostics must once have watched at Chartres, for a sign, a confirmation of faith. I see frozen trout; fresh strawberries; eighty cases of live worms; seventy-three pounds of gold for Geneva, packed in light green metal boxes sealed with embossed aluminum bands, wrapped in clear plastic, banded again with steel strapping.

Here, says Lopez, are the proofs of what we believe in: our gods are our goods. If there be any "sign" it lies in the way that gold has been so elaborately boxed, sealed, banded, wrapped, and strapped.

But the essay says more than that. It attests to Lopez's fascination with technology—a boyhood dream was to be an aeronautical engineer—and he even went to Everett, Washington, to watch one of these "lovely, shrieking behemoths" being built. "Looking at its flat, streaked belly," he sees that the plane has "the curved flanks of a baleen whale, in an identical scale, exact to the extended flukes of its horizontal stabilizer." By admitting his fascination with the plane, and appreciating its "natural" form, Lopez introduces moral complexity (as he always does) into the essay. He refuses to complain of this soulless new machine. He does not pretend to hate it or simplify its consequences. In all this he reminds me of Thoreau in *Walden* admiring the wondrous "iron horse" that was transforming his landscape—for better as well as for worse.

"Flight" thus becomes the lynchpin of Lopez's book. His earlier travels

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to Bonaire and Japan and Antarctica were all—pointedly—made possible by airplane. The next group of essays, all placed in American geographies, is prefaced by "Apologia," where the necessary technology that everybody admires is the automobile, and the moral issue is road kill: "We treat the attrition of lives on the road like the attrition of lives in war: horrifying, unavoidable, justified." Automobiles also figure portentously in the book's final four narratives, where Lopez faces up to (but does not resolve) some moral complexities that still haunt him from his youth. But the image of that behemoth cargo plane continues to dominate the book, as it must if he is to tell the truth about the world we actually live in.

One of Lopez's most interesting qualities, as an environmental writer, is his refusal to separate "humanity and nature" as most of us do. He learned early that many people on the earth, who do not dichotomize wilderness and civilization, know how to live in it better than we do. And do not consume it, turning it into commodities and waste. He learned too that most of these people are voiceless, their wisdom scorned, their knowledge dismissed. Caught in the same condescension and dismissal, Lopez always reminds us, are animals. They are clearly his favorite test, in this book as in all his others. Like Henry Beston, he asks us to imagine the depths of their knowledge and understanding, to realize that they live "by voices we shall never hear." Every essay in this book makes some reference to animals, whether it be the grisly details of road kill in "Apologia" or the gift of an elegant "owl's long flight feather" in "A Short Passage in Northern Hokkaido." But at the conclusion of that lynchpin essay, "Flight," Lopez does it best. He watches caged penguins being loaded—after the frozen trout, strawberries, and gold—onto that 747-400:

> The penguins stand erect in narrow cells, five cells forming a wooden crate. A wire mesh panel on the front, beginning at chest level, slants up and back, reaching the top of the crate just above their head height. . . . I recognize megellanic and rockhopper penguins. If they're making any noise I cannot hear it over the jet engines. A few strike at the wire mesh with their bills. Some of the rockhoppers rise on their toes, cramping their heads, and flap their flippers repeatedly against the dividers.

The effect is not quite the same as road kill, but almost. How does that sequence go? Horrifying, unavoidable, justified.

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THOMAS M. DISCH

# Job Opportunities in Contemporary Poetry

I HAVE FOR A LONG TIME BEEN OF THE OPINION that writing poetry, like good manners at dinner, should be a commonplace among any group of cultivated people, and is not a specifically "professional" accomplishment. There will always be those who excel at it, as there are those who are handsomer or dance with more panache. But the often aggrieved expectation that the creation of a body of poems entitles one to a stipend sufficient to subsist on *and* have free holidays at an artists' colony seems to me grasshopperism at its most presumptuous. Yet such has become an article of faith not only among poets of the middle rank, especially those who conduct writing workshops for a living, but also among the swelling ranks of bureaucrats who manage the foundations, colonies, and government offices devoted to the arts' own little welfare state within the larger one. For the price of just one jet bomber, these advocates insist, every poet in the country could be sent to Jamaica for a month of poetry bake-offs.

It may well be that there are some poets who would not fill even the slenderest of volumes without being funded by a trust fund or the federal Maecenas. I have one grasshopper friend who insists this is a universal truth and offers Sylvia Plath as an instance of the toll exacted on a poet's nobler nature by household chores. But there are persuasive counterexamples; indeed, a whole volume of them—*Blood & Bone*,[1] an anthology of one hundred poems written by 34 contemporary physicians, 7 of them women. From the time they begin their training, cramming to be accepted into medical school and on through the rigors of a hospital internship, doctors are the most hard-worked of professionals. The contributors to *Blood & Bone* would seem to be overachievers in a world of overachievement. Among them are deans, chiefs of oncology, departmental directors, and writers of best-selling nonfiction; their poems have appeared in such varied venues as *Poetry, Georgia Review, Exquisite Corpse, Ploughshares*, as well as in their own professional journals. The overall caliber of the poems is as at least as high as the generality of the poems one might find in the journals just mentioned, thanks to the absence of the commoner types of clinkers that bulk out

[1] BLOOD & BONE: Poems by Physicians, ed. by *Angela Belli* and *Jack Coulehan*. University of Iowa Press. $29.95; $17.95.

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so many poets' pages. No pipsqueak surrealism, no gardening manuals, no forced confessions, nor other forms of poetic cruise control. Instead, the editors, Angela Belli and Jack Coulehan, have chosen poems that spring from the poets' professional competences and interests. This gives them an instant edge over all those grasshopper poets who have nothing in particular to write about and whose work reflects that absence. All the contributors merit the praise we give to figures of "authority" when we say that "they know what they're talking about."

And what they know about is of compelling and universal interest: the flesh in all its mechanical, Rube-Goldberg intricacy; suffering, death, and the dramas they give rise to. Further, doctors work under an imperative to remain cool in the midst of stormy emotions, their own and others'—a job requirement that poets would do well to emulate. The only poetic drawback that the practice of medicine would seem to exact is a certain *froideur* of tone that comes from seeing, and sewing up, too many wounds—as when Rafael Campo (of Harvard and Boston Beth Israel) writes of a victim of spousal abuse under his care:

> . . . I infiltrated first with lidocaine.
> She barely winced, and didn't start to cry
> Until the sixteenth stitch went in and we
> Were almost through. I thought my handiwork
> Was admirable. I yawned, then offered her
> Instructions on the care of wounds. She left.

The first ten lines of the poem are as spare as these last six. The exigence seems to be what the job requires for sixteen stitches, or sixteen lines of verse.

If there is a consistent deficiency among these poems, it is Fancy, and the formal footwork that so often goes with it. The virtual absence of formal concerns, or accomplishment, among the poets (their prosody is intuitive, and they eschew rhyme) is unremarkable in an era when a majority of full-time poets are also careless of such distinctions. The characteristic sobriety of the selections may be a function of the taste of the editors or a side-effect of their focusing on poems with medical themes. In off-duty hours the poets may well be larkier. Marc J. Straus, one of the most beguiling contributors, does a witty job of extrapolating an entire life from the evidence of a cough audible in the recording of a 1928 Horowitz recital. The cougher upstages the pianist until

> Late, much too late, he'd be moved to
> a sanitarium and die in '32.
> There remains a recording of him
> that I heard on the radio today.

And Kirsten Emmott, who practices in Comox, British Columbia, answers the title question of "Who Looks after Your Kids?" with a

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crescendo of exasperated lies, ending with "Nobody, I tie them to a tree in the / back yard all day. My senile old grandmother. The Wicked Witch / of the West." It's flip, brisk, and lucid, like much of the book, which can be recommended to medical professionals who like poetry and to poetry readers who are also human.

Thomas Lynch[2] follows a trade in combination with his work as a poet that is rarer than doctoring. He is an undertaker—the only *literary* undertaker I know of. He is also a professional Irishman (with an ancestral cottage in West County Clare) with a gift for ribaldry and for jests that only reveal their scorpion meaning a few beats after one has been bitten. His wily humor, in combination with his willingness to part the curtains of the embalming room, makes for irresistible reading, whether in his poems or his essays (recently collected in *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*, Penguin, $12.95).

Like the doctors in *Blood & Bone*, Lynch has a privileged professional relation to fleshly matters, which cohabits—oddly, sometimes—with a teenagerish fascination with the shadier words in the dictionary. At age thirteen, for instance, he confesses to having been obsessed with "Tits."

> Tits everywhere. Even Sister Jean Therese . . .
> . . . for all her blue habits and scapular,
> standing at the blackboards, sideways, couldn't hide them.

A few poems later, he is still harping on the same theme.

> . . . Maybe I oughtn't to be naming names.
> Maybe Sister Jean Therese is still alive,
> married to a former priest or nine to five
> with one of those human-service agencies . . .
> . . . maybe I should have used an alias.
> Maybe what I should have said was *breasts*
> though tits is what they seemed and ever shall seem
> world without end. *Parce Domine mei.*

The effect is uncannily as though one were reading *The Poems of Leopold Bloom*, even to the extent that Bloom's uncensored interior monologues are meant as a Sancho Panza corrective to the quixotic ponderings of Steven Dedalus. Lynch's poems may be read, similarly, as a reproach to the hauteurs of the Poetically Correct.

Lynch is a most conventional poet who takes his notion of the art from the tribes of the workshop, writing of the things he knows—his work, his homes, his marriage—in plain language. (Even the Latin tag in the poem above he learned as an altar boy, not at college.) "The Moveen Notebook," the centerpiece of the collection, is a thirteen-page memoir of those Lynches left behind in West County Clare, from one of whom,

[2] STILL LIFE IN MILFORD, by *Thomas Lynch*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. $21.00.

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his great-aunt Nora, he would inherit both homestead and a horde of family lore

> . . . kept alive
> in the cold heaven of her memory
> that tallied all but ten years of the century
> the rest of us kept track of by the wars
> but Nora measured by the ones she'd known:
> who'd lived where, who'd married whom, who died.
> And after that, who was left to grieve them.
> Who waited in the land, who moved away.
> Who sent home dollars. Who sent home pounds.
> Who sang, who danced, who played, who drank too much . . .

Lynch has surely earned his portion of the family holdings by his tending of the flame, and this may be taken as a metonymy for the task of poetry, remembering and rendering tribute to the works and days from which our civilization is compounded.

Which brings us, by an unexpected side entrance, to two new books from the indefatigable David R. Slavitt.[3] Among Slavitt's sixty-plus books are eleven volumes of his own poems and translations of the work of Virgil, Ovid, Seneca—and, now, of the Latin poet of the Silver Age, Ausonius, whose work prefigures that of OULIPO[4] by almost two millennia, and the Greek poet Bacchylides whose epinician odes celebrate the victories of Olympic athletes in the fifth century B.C. A different way of passing on the flame than Lynch's, but one as little likely to stir widespread interest, and no less essential.[5]

Slavitt is not alone among poets in swearing a double allegiance—to Erato and to her half-sister Aliena, Muse of Translation. Among contemporary poets who have worked (sometimes lucratively) as translators are Richard Howard, John Ciardi, W.S. Merwin, and Rika Lesser. For poets of a certain temperament, indeed, the two tasks are nearly cognate, representing in their diverse ways the most intimate possible relationship to language *an sich*, or *ipse*, or *in se stesso*, or *en soi*.

Of Slavitt's two flames, Bacchylides burns the brighter. Known as "a

[3] THREE AMUSEMENTS, by *Ausonius*, and EPICINICIAN ODES AND DITHYRAMBS OF BACCHYLIDES, both trans. by *David R. Slavitt*. University of Pennsylvania Press. $22.50, $23.00, respectively.

[4] OULIPO, or l'Ouvroir de Litterature Potentialle (Workshop of Possible Fictions) is a formal grouping of latter-day surrealists, including Harry Matthews, Georges Perec, and Italo Calvino.

[5] Lynch describes himself, ruefully, in *The Undertaking*, as "an internationally unknown poet" and "not exactly a household name," while Slavitt, in a note explaining what had drawn him to translate Bacchylides, writes: "There was a further reward, too, in that, whenever strangers at parties asked me what I was working on . . . I was able for a time to reply that I was translating the epinician odes and dithyrambs of Bacchylides—which shut them up." Even the loftiest of poets, it seems, are not without a grasshopperish sense of having been passed by.

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lesser Pindar," Bacchylides was little more than a literary footnote until 1896 when a papyrus was discovered containing 1,382 lines to supplement the 107 then known to exist. An epinician ode was one of the perks of winning at the Olympic games [*epi* = after, *nike* = victory], and Slavitt offers them to us with this caveat: "They [such odes] seem to us, at least at first blush, just a little extravagant, mannered displays of strenuous and elaborate toadying." Add to this the charm of vast lacunae, and a typical shard of Bacchylides may look like this:

> To these, his children,
> the gods have good fortune, as founders
> of prosperous cities that never would be sacked.
> . . . . . who of the land of the Achaeans
> . . . . . trials . . . . . .
> . . . . . with beautiful robe . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . and Corinth's fountain, Peirene,
> with twisted garlands, and other notable daughters
> of the ancient and resounding river
> who were overcome in the beds of the glorious gods.

To readers schooled on Pound and later poets who simulated such effects of Ozymandian absence, the obscurities of a shattered text are elegiac in themselves and remind us that we are handling, in Rika Lesser's phrase, "Etruscan things," once commonplace objects, now mysterious artifacts. One may not linger long beside the cabinets that house them (Slavitt's *Bacchylides* is a fleeting 83 pages), but a more absorbing book would lack the redolence of sheer strangeness. Those who enjoy the luxury of a vast library would be advised, as so many epitaphs counsel, to stop and trace the letters on the monument.

Ausonius is another kettle of fish, a poet so post-modern in his own time, *circa* 380, as to seem a contemporary now. Here is Slavitt's version of the poet's tribute to Exuperius, rhetorician of Toulouse:

> Your eloquence, man, was matchless, beyond all reason,
> or, say without any reason. But all the purer,
> flights of clouds on the wind, storms without rain
> or lightning in the bowl of the high sky,
> furious demonstrations of syntax, sheerest
> persiflage and rodomontade to perplex
> and amaze with gestures no one had seen before
> and no sane man has attempted since. . . .

Was Ausonius really as forthrightly snide as this? Thomas Lynch's backhanded compliments seem, by comparison, models of decorum. As for "A Nuptial Cento," the book's florid centerpiece, it is less a translation than an imitation. Where Ausonius cobbles together a

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hundred lines from the works of Virgil into a (presumably) lascivious epithalamion, Slavitt takes a hundred lines from Shakespeare and plays the same trick, which affects at least this reader as a love of labor more than a labor of love. But how wonderful to think that as long ago as 380 A.D. civilization had already stockpiled surpluses sufficient for grasshoppers to pass their nights in such conspicuous idleness!

Since the time of Bacchylides and well before, warfare has been one of the preferred alternative careers for those inclined to poetry. The founding literary works of every culture celebrate the victories of warriors and only then begin to chronicle other events. Just as they trigger vivid dreams, the extremities of horror, fear, rage, and impassioned friendship act as spurs to art. (There is also a link with the two professions discussed above; the operative word is trauma.)

The anthologies in this case have been many, and here are two more,[6] as unlike each other esthetically and politically as two anthologies of war poetry well may be. The sixty-six "Soldier-Poets" in Anne Powell's book are presented in the chronological order of their deaths, from Lt. R.W. Sterling on April 23, 1915, to Wilfred Owen on November 4, 1918, a week short of Armistice Day. Death on the Western Front (and British citizenship) rather than poetic merit qualifies a poet for inclusion, and this deference to the Great Equalizer gives the 470-page volume an oddly democratic character. Side by side with the works of such well-known WWI poets as Owen and Edward Thomas one can find poems as little memorable as "The Soldier" by Second Lt. Arthur Mann (died April 10, 1917, at age twenty-one):

> 'Tis strange to look on a man that is dead
> As he lies in the shell-swept hell,
> And to think that the poor blackened corpse
> Once lived liked you and was well.
>
> 'Tis stranger far when you come to think
> That you may be soon like him . . .
> And it's Fear that tugs at your trembling soul,
> A Fear that is weird and grim!

Yet the fascination of *A Deep Cry* lies precisely in these poems rescued from local newspapers and family archives, in the great sorrowful heap of failed art and dead bodies. Owen and Thomas, at least, wrote poems that have lived almost a century now; they are ticketed for immortal fame along with Bacchylides and Ausonius. One cannot say as much, alas, for young Mann or Captain Richard Dennys (died July 24, 1916, at age thirty-one), who is memorialized by a friend as ". . . a dreamer . . . an

[6] A DEEP CRY: First World War Soldier-Poets Killed in France and Flanders, ed. by *Anne Powell*. Sutton. £14.99p. FROM BOTH SIDES NOW: The Poetry of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath, ed. by *Phillip Mahony*. Scribner. $30.00; $16.00.

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essential amateur; not in the vile modern sense but in the fine old meaning of that terribly ill-treated word," and who wrote, himself, in "War":

> The distant cannon's boom
> In a land oppressed
> Still spake the gloom
> Of a country's doom,
> Denying rest.
> "War!" called the frightened rooks and flew
> From the crimson East to the crimson West.

It is now almost a consensus view that World War One was a terrible mistake, and that the only winner was Death. Indeed, as soon as the war was over that was the received wisdom of poets, novelists, and polemicists. Those of a morose or grandiose temper might view the slaughter in the trenches by poison gas and machine-gun fire as the industrialization of warfare or as an embodiment of the Death Wish latent in Western Civilization. Powell does not editorialize in these regards, but she does include appendices and ten maps to assist readers in finding the graves of her poets, and the commentary she does offer is often off-target to the point of looking daft, as when she waxes poetic herself over the cemeteries of the War Graves Commission: "Today, these lovely gardens of rest, even those on the edge of housing estates or close to motorways, radiate a sense of infinite peace." And her conclusion, that these poets "represent the millions of combatants on the conflicting sides," is belied by the exclusion of all but British poets. "Their underlying message of hope for reconciliation, tolerance and peace went unheeded," she declares, heedless herself of the many voices of witness not to be found in these pages.

The more than 140 poets whose work is showcased in Philip Mahony's *From Both Sides Now* represent a fair cross-section of the human lives touched by the Vietnam War: soldiers in the American, North, and South Vietnamese armies; their widows and orphans; those who protested against the war, those who reported on it, and those who survived the fighting and lived to rue it. The prevailing tone is one of dismay, with varying admixtures of anger, regret, and contrition—but how should it be otherwise?

Like *A Deep Cry*, the book's interest is largely documentary. The celebrity poets might seem to have a professional edge, but they suffer the same rhetorical liability that poets of the home front are always under. They know the war through newspapers and TV. Personal involvement is authenticating. Indeed, that has become one of the first principles of contemporary poetry. These are, in fact, the poems I spoke of as I began, which are like good manners at dinner, the poems we should expect to be written when the right set of circumstances arises.

The editor, who works for the New York City Police Department,

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evidently views these poems in the same light. "Despite being a lifelong lover of poetry," he writes in his preface, "I had become disheartened by a sense that the poetry world was becoming monopolized by an elitist cartel of university creative writing teachers . . ." He wants "a poetry that aspires to *matter*, to confront and shine new light on significant events and issues of our time." Mahony is scarcely alone in wishing for a poetry more solidly connected to the culture it inhabits—a citizens' poetry, so to speak—but to have offered a concrete and abundant example of the kind of poetry that might be is a less common undertaking. As a panorama of responses to a divisive issue, *From Both Sides Now* is an absorbing read, with the best work not that of the left liberal poetry establishment, who tend to be dutiful and strident,[7] but of those such as R.L. Barth and Yusef Komunyakaa, who made their names as poets of the war. The stratification between the establishment poets and the many John Does is wide, and the twain meet only glancingly despite the editor's (and his readers') good intentions. This is not to dismiss, in either anthology, those who bear witness artlessly but only to note the difficulty of decreeing Parnassus a democracy.

Among full-time professional poets at the apogee of their professional careers there is no one now in better odor than the Irish-American Paul Muldoon. All five of the back-cover blurbs on his ninth volume of poetry, *Hay*,[8] hail him as "one of" if not outright the "most"—and then take your pick: accomplished (twice), inventive, ambitious, beautiful, or, simply, greatest (twice). Surely, Muldoon has an abundance of talent and has honed his craft to a fine edge. His poetry machine would seem to be always activated, so that in a sequence of ninety haiku (with rhyming first and third lines) he strikes off riffs of verse at virtually every footstep. Some are spot-on, some take unriddling, a few are opaque as concrete ("From the white-hot bales / Caravats and Shanavests / step with white-hot flails"). Yet for every closed door I am confident the author could supply a key, and on the whole Muldoon's haiku are quicksilver, with the brushwork of a Sargent watercolor. Much the same can be said for stretches of Muldoon's longer poems.

The question for such a poet is what task to adopt worthy of the machinery. Muldoon's chosen task has been the Wordsworthian Sublime with a twist of surrealism, a choice that implies that the poet's daily life, when mediated by his Muse, is the stuff theogonies are made of. His old girlfriends are the White Goddess, and his free associations vatic utterances. It follows from this that each of his poems becomes a kind of Holy Writ on which Muldoon himself may then write an entire Midrashic literature, the key to which is a perfect knowledge of Muldoon's taste in wine and pop music, his pets' peculiarities, all the

[7] Among those not at their best: George Starbuck, Sharon Olds, Hayden Carruth, James Schuyler, Grace Paley, and Daniel Berrigan. Their poems are not reprehensible, just below par.

[8] HAY, by *Paul Muldoon.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. $22.00.

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books he's ever read, and the history of Ireland. The rhyme schemes of poems in one book reappear in later poems in reverent homage to the poet's ever vaster and more mellifluous oeuvre. He is a law unto himself.

From this description it must be evident that I am not among those, like Richard Tillinghast of the *New York Times Book Review*, who consider Muldoon "one of the two or three most accomplished rhymers now writing in English," unless one quibbles over "rhymer" and narrows the field by ninety percent. I think Muldoon's solution to the problem that all abundantly gifted and *fertile* poets face at mid-career is not one calculated to enlarge the spirit any more than a set of exceptionally well-wrought crossword puzzles, and my own candidate for "one of the two or three most" etc. would be the no less abundant Albert Goldbarth, whose latest collection, *Beyond*,[9] is, line by line, almost the antithesis of *Hay*.

Goldbarth's forte is the ever-ramifying digression, the meander and boomerang home. He is the world's patient accountant and inventory-taker, for whom

> it's Sunday night—my wife is reading in bed, with the grim
> conviction that the work-week upcoming is going to be one
> spirit-dead, hellacious spate of days—and so her mood,
> her mind, increasingly assume the uber-darkness of the night
> itself, the way "industrial melanization" means those moths
> in the factory districts gradually blackened to match
> their new, soot/city background: . . .

To stop quoting Goldbarth at any moment is always to interrupt his train of thought and the tumble of objects from the magpie closet of his imagination, which releases, in the same poem, this "day's scan of newspaper cullings":

> . . . I learn someone's investigated the annual global methane
> emission
> in cattle gas; that every seven years a god will fill the toad
> attached to the tip of a ritual ribboned pole, and glow like a lamp
> in its warty belly—then it rains; that only yesterday a girl,
> eleven, was found with the name of a rival gang, the *Lady Satans*,
> carefully cut in her thigh and rubbed with drainpipe acid.
> Somewhere
> there may be a world where such as these are equally legitimized,
> but
> not here in the thick and swirling mist of Planet Albert . . .

[9] BEYOND, by *Albert Goldbarth*. David R. Godine. $13.95p.

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At a certain level of choice—between, say, Bach and Beethoven—even the most confident critic must allow for mere personal preference. My own taste will always take me to Planet Albert as against Planet Paul, but I must allow as how both planets have a rich and complex ecology, friendly natives, and a rich indigenous musical culture.

In any case, it is a spurious dilemma. There's no need to settle on just "one of the two or three most accomplished," etc., when two of the two or three most accomplished are ready to hand.

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R. S. GWYNN

# Subject Matters

NO GROUP OF POETS HAS SUFFERED WORSE at the hands of posterity than the Georgians, whose poems were collected in five eponymous semiannual anthologies. The last of these had the misfortune to appear in the same year as *The Waste Land*, and after Eliot, Edith Sitwell, and Middleton Murry had finished mopping the floor with it, the Georgians were consigned to the back matter of the history of modernism. Of their number, none has been devalued more than Rupert Brooke, who is remembered chiefly as the poster boy for British army recruitment, the result of the great popularity of "1914," the sonnet sequence he wrote in the last year of his life. Brooke, who by all accounts was intelligent, handsome, charming, a bit facetious, and a fearlessly outspoken Fabian in matters political, would doubtless have been appalled by the reasons for his posthumous fame. But, to readers familiar with Sassoon, Graves, and Owen, his lines comparing a foredoomed generation's call to the trenches to "swimmers into cleanness leaping" seem hopelessly, even criminally naive.

A shame in a way, for the poetry on which Brooke built a not inconsiderable reputation accurately captures that lulling decade before the Great War, an era which, if the huge success of *Titanic* is any measure, large numbers of us still privately embrace (Those tea dances! Those great hats!). It must have been an auspicious time for a rising young poet, especially if, like Brooke, one had the necessary prerequisites of social standing, the right school ties, a bit of money, and rather more of talent. The typical Brookean/Georgian poem celebrates the long mornings at the country house, mowed lawns and overgrown gardens, the declamation of one's latest strophes over crumpets and croquet balls with even the fish "fly-replete, in depth of June, / Dawdling away their wat'ry noon." Even what Brooke later called "all the little emptiness of love" rarely breaks the calm; one's most fervent passions are reserved for "the cool kindliness of sheets, that soon / Smooth away trouble," and no matter seems more pressing than that notorious closing question, "And is there honey still for tea?" Reading the Georgian anthologies provides quick transport into the servants-at-the-ready realm of Merchant-Ivory—sans conflict, bad weather, and the Great War lurking in the shadows.

I dredge up this ancient matter for a reason: if the work of many contemporary poets is any indication, we are in the midst of a Georgian revival. The weekend has become the setting in which our poets thrive.

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Who can blame them? They live in comfortable times; the issues that impelled them thirty years ago to take to the barricades lie far behind. They are loath to resurrect their checkered pasts or to jeopardize their futures by confessing present sins. They may have lived through the whirlwind but now seem content to cultivate their gardens—not imaginary ones with real toads in them but real ones flourishing with everything but imagination. They desperately need the challenge of urgent subjects but cannot urge themselves to look for them outside their own privacy fences. We have slipped from the Age of Causes to the Age of Cozy; if Thoreau were to survey the current scene, he might be forced to conclude that the mass of men lead lives of quiet.

If James Dickey, whose selected poems[1] have recently appeared, is to have any lasting legacy, it strikes me that it will lie in the way he was able to infuse our suburban humdrum with an energy that is well nigh sacramental. Rereading early poems like "Sleeping Out on Easter," "The Vegetable King" or "The Mountain Tent," I *know* that this is just Everyguy camping out in a state park on the fringes of urban Atlanta, but a palpable shiver still comes with lines like

> I am hearing the shape of the rain
> Take the shape of the tent and believe it,
> Laying down all around where I lie
> A profound, unspeakable law.

Those incantatory trimeters contribute to the effect, true, but I can never hear them without feeling a little smaller and weaker, without wishing my inadequate sleeping bag could hide me completely. As stagey and predictable as many of Dickey's performances seem when we revisit them, they were, and *are*, capable of generating an awe that none of his contemporaries ever quite managed. If I am not quite struck with it on reading "Falling" for the umpteenth time, I can at least honestly recall that I *was* the first five or six.

Rupert Brooke's reputation has declined mightily, but that falling off seems less precipitous than the collapse of Dickey's, the fault less of the poems that made his name than of the noisy celebrity and weak books of his last two decades. His work has all but disappeared from the anthologies of American literature, and even in Norton's recent *The Literature of the American South* he is allotted only the same number of pages as nikki giovanni! His son's widely read memoir and the inevitable biographies will doubtless spur reassessments; thus, it is good to have Robert Kirschten's portable volume at hand. That said, I can't help but have several regrets about the editor's initial assumptions and the choices that result. In an attempt to define Dickey's best qualities, Kirschten outlines Dickey's "four major poetic modes": his natural

[1] THE SELECTED POEMS, by *James Dickey*. Ed. by *Robert Kirschten*. Wesleyan University Press. $35.00; $15.95.

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mysticism, his Pythagorean reverence for music, his romanticism, and his primitivism. These are valid enough, perhaps, but they ignore the solid grounding in his generation's realities that gave Dickey's early work such resonance. First, there are the war poems. Kirschten includes "The Performance," with its curious syntax brilliantly mimicking the unsteady acrobatics of its doomed protagonist, but he excludes "Between Two Prisoners," in which two captured Americans await execution in an island schoolroom, and the spooky "The Driver," where Dickey (as always, a problematical assumption) dives into a Pacific lagoon and sits in the driver's seat of a sunken half-track.

Further, I miss many of Dickey's best poems of postwar civilized discontent: "The Leap," a narrative about the suicide of a woman remembered from childhood; "On the Coosawattee," which contains the probable (and certainly less melodramatic) genesis of *Deliverance*; "Power and Light," a brutal blue-collar dramatic monologue; and "Adultery," which is bracketed by the best opening and closing lines of any Dickey poem: "We have all been in rooms / We cannot die in, and they are odd places, and sad" and

> We have done it again we are
> Still living. Sit up and smile,
> God bless you. Guilt is magical.

I would have preferred more guilty magic like this (and where is the marvelous "Kudzu"?) to reprinting the ten-page "Reincarnation (II)" or more than the briefest sample from Dickey's last book, the inscrutable *The Eagle's Mile.*

Kirschten states that his aim is "to gather and showcase [Dickey's] very best material" and in doing so has to admit that Dickey's collected poems, *The Whole Motion*, is a bit *too* whole for most tastes (even Dickey excluded portions of the slack *Puella*). Kirschten does get a fair portion of the best ones in his limited space (the book is over a hundred pages shorter than *Poems 1957–1967*), but it is probably a sign of the times that in introducing Dickey's four "politically controversial" poems—"Slave Quarters," "The Fiend," "The Sheep Child," and "The Firebombing"—he feels it necessary to attach a disclaimer (his italics): "Further, *representation is not recommendation.*" Now we can all sleep better. One wonders how this editor would preface a selection from the works of Robert Browning.

Dickey once said, "The whole tragedy of the American poets of my generation is that they were afraid to change. . . ." Dickey's own example provides one effective counterargument to that, for his changes in retrospect seem invariably for the worst. Another is provided by Gerald Stern, two years Dickey's junior, who has had a career that is anything but tragic, capped recently with a National Book Award for a

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selected volume[2] that reveals no change whatsoever from beginning to end. One could argue that Stern, whose first book sprang fully armed from his balding head in 1973, had arrived at a mature manner with his debut; but despite the generous spirits and likeable qualities of his poems, the sameness of subject and approach that runs through the whole collection eventually wears its welcome out, about what one would expect from a book which lists almost fifty entries beginning with the first-person pronoun in its index of titles and first lines. The often-anthologized "Behaving like a Jew" is a case in point. The poet finds a dead opossum and pulls it off the road. The act itself is not crucial—there is none of Stafford's explanation that "that road is narrow, to swerve might make more dead"—but it nevertheless occasions an emotional response:

> I am sick of the country, the bloodstained
> bumpers, the stiff hairs sticking out of the grilles,
> the slimy highways, the heavy birds
> refusing to move;
> I am sick of the spirit of Lindbergh over everything,
> that joy in death, that philosophical
> understanding of carnage, that
> concentration on the species.

Is "to behave like a Jew" to show extravagant sympathy for the individual organism, to "touch his face, and stare into his eyes"? Or is it a larger matter, impelling Stern to take issue with Lindbergh's ecological views, which, in this context, must confirm his documented anti-Semitism? I vote for the former; Stern rarely departs from the stance that Frank O'Hara, no heavy trafficker in ideas himself, called "personism." Unlike O'Hara, Stern often gets weepy, but calling him a sentimentalist is like calling Pat Robertson a conservative; he puts his feelings right up front:

> my eyes are still weak and misty
> from his round belly and his curved fingers
> and his black whiskers and his little dancing feet.

What other contemporary could get away with "It's nice to think of tears as polliwogs / rolling down your face"?

Meanwhile, life goes on in Stern country. The poet praises his breakfast grapefruit. He putters among the phlox and pyracantha, considers repotting. He goes for a walk, generally in the present tense progressive. The maimed and dead animals—crippled pigeons, cat-mangled piles of feathers, more roadkill, a squirrel decaying in a water barrel—proliferate. The poet stops in many cafes, where he praises the

[2] THIS TIME: New and Selected Poems, by *Gerald Stern*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. $27.50; $14.00.

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coffee. At home, he eats a duck. Occasionally he hops a plane to a reading or drives in a Citation, singing to Villa-Lobos in spite of the fact that it's New Jersey outside. His sofa is of mohair, and he favors boots called Georgia Loggers for the outdoors and slippers called romeos (helpfully glossed in a footwearnote) for the in. He remembers an old flame, thinks about calling her, thinks the better of it. He takes a nap and wakes up refreshed enough to rise to a few lovely passages of real lyrical intensity:

> as in the bridal wreath
> that smells like honey, that covers a city with cream,
> there is one day for pomp; as in the dogwood
> there is one day for sadness, four curled petals
> with drops of blood, growing white or pink
> in the cold dirt, all the more to be
> the contrast, under some maple or huge cherry,
> for me a blossom of thought supreme. . . .

With fourteen new poems, the collection ends on some surprisingly strong notes, most prominently in the compact "The Sounds of Wagner," one of the best-realized pieces in the collection. Consider its second and concluding stanza:

> He loved lavender more than anything else
> and never forgot the sunsuit he wore, nor did he
> ever forget looking into the tiny window
> of a music listening room and seeing his darling
> fucking someone else on the carpeted floor,
> her earphones still intact though his—the lover's—
> an Air Corps Cadet—his hung askew and the sounds
> of Wagner floated or scattered throughout the room,
> and he could hear it, nor did he ever forget
> his walk that day through the park and how ashamed
> he felt, and bitter, and how he weathered it.

I only wish that Stern didn't have to reach back thirty years before his first book to recover the pain that lies behind such a gripping poem as this; too much of the time his poetry reads like the journals of an early retiree.

As a young poet growing up in the South, where the shadow of Dickey loomed larger than elsewhere, Andrew Hudgins must have been aware of Dickey's aesthetic of change. A good portion of his work has been autobiographical and anecdotal, like that of many of his contemporaries, but he has extended his range through long dramatic-narrative sequences, "Saints and Strangers" from his first collection and the book-length *After the Lost War*, which appropriates the voice of Sydney

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Lanier. *Babylon in a Jar*,[3] his fifth book, for the most part stays close to home—the ubiquitous garden, a Reds game, an after-class confrontation with a student—but Hudgins' nutshell provides more than adequate space for his ruminations. The student, who disturbs his classmates by showing them a newspaper clipping detailing how he beat his abusive father to death with a baseball bat, clings to our contemporary faith in celebrity as saving grace. After Hudgins sternly reprimands him, he only offers:

> "I got my picture in the paper." He reached
> back toward his hip. "You want to see the clipping?"

Following him—at a prudent distance—out into the dark, Hudgins wonders:

> But what, when no one loved me, have I done
> but talk, talk, talk until I've said, like Peter,
> the thing I shouldn't say or, like tonight,
> until I've said exactly what I had to say.

I rarely read new books from front to back; I am more likely to leaf through until something—a title, a shape, a line—catches my eye. In Hudgins' case it was "One Threw a Dirt Clod and It Ran," which grabbed my attention when I realized it was based on an incident in a nearby small town that must have made the national wires: a group of teenagers had tortured and beaten to death a prized horse. Incidents of inexplicable violence like this provide occasion for the usual sages—ministers, social workers, politicians—to leap to the soapboxes, but Hudgins tries to enter minds in which the dawning of the moral overlaps the thrill of brute power:

> Gasping for breath,
> they stared at one another, dropped the post, the
> stones, the sticks.
> They nudged the huge corpse and waited for it to rise,
> to rise and gallop over rutted, fenced-off fields
> as if there were no ruts, no mudholes, scrub brush,
> wire,
> so they could follow it forever, weeping and hurling
> stones.

Hudgins knows that chaos surrounds and threatens even the most orderly life and that poetry provides its one containment; his book's title alludes to Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon and how "he swept up

[3] BABYLON IN A JAR, by *Andrew Hudgins*. Houghton Mifflin Company. $22.00.

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the dust of Babylon / to give as presents, and he stored it in a jar." Faced with such depressing knowledge, historical and otherwise, he can hardly be faulted for finding small affirmations in soil made fecund with history's losses:

> Plant two seeds, pluck the weaker seedling,
>
> and listen to the crow when soft
>
> corpses
> bloat on the battlefield, on Fountain Square,
> beside the empty highway,
> beneath the ornamental cherry.
>
> Listen to the crow, the street dog, beetle.
>
> Spartans died only for Sparta.
>
> Plant two seeds. Death is never wasted.

Rachel Wetzsteon's *Home and Away*,[4] a second book from a poet just in her thirties, is a perplexing collection. Her work arrives with superlatives ("the most impressive verse . . .," "the most variously gifted . . .") from Richard Howard and John Hollander, the Siskel and Ebert of contemporary blurbists, but her approaches to situation and subject are so evasive that one wonders if the Clinton depositions have not become a new rhetorical paradigm for poets. "Brief Encounters" opens this way:

> By as many times as the framed sets of teeth
> have grown, sprouting habits and limbs, you've shrunk—
> fine for a past-tense version of what
> you do, but somehow, now, giving you
> a terrible present.

There is obvious animosity here, but who is being addressed? A mercenary orthodontist ("framed sets of teeth")? After twenty lines or so Wetzsteon describes herself as "the one / who gets up and leaves when the hour is up," and perhaps the shrunk/shrink word play becomes a bit clearer; nevertheless, this kind of coyness, which runs through much of the book, soon becomes irritating. It's as if Wetzsteon, resolute on avoiding the disclosures of the confessional, has taken refuge in the mode of private correspondence; alas, reading other people's mail is not very profitable if one has no clue as to their identities.

*Home and Away* begins with a sequence of fifty unrhymed sonnets apparently about a failed love affair. Several of the poems apparently

[4] HOME AND AWAY, by *Rachel Wetzsteon*. Penguin. $14.95.

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focus on a park bench, apparently a place of sentimental associations for the lovers, or for one of them at least. I hate to keep saying *apparently*, but the details rarely emerge from the foliage. The vogue of the unrhymed sonnet can, I suppose, be traced to Robert Lowell, who after two decades of mortal combat with the ghost of Milton decided that an easier adversary would be Merrill Moore. But Lowell's sonnets seem lax models for emulation; the rare thrills they offered came primarily from anecdotes about other poets or disclosures about Lowell's own tortured personal life. A fourteen-line box of pentameters that avoids the structural elements that have sustained the sonnet is not a particularly demanding choice of form. When Wetzsteon manages a turn or two, in accordance with the sonnet's traditional movement, she scores a rare success:

> Acting in accordance with your wishes,
> let us try a quick experiment:
> buy a house and set it down on firm soil
> and, completing all the steps required,
> fill it to the brim with embryo yous.
> When little creatures hang from chandeliers
> and steal your treasured hours, ask yourself
> the reason for the choice: was it to fill
> the wanting world with more endangered lives
> like yours? Was it to cauterize old wounds?
> Was it to see yourself forever blended
> with a beloved other? If the first,
> sheer hubris; if the second, lots of luck;
> if the third, when water blends with oil.

When a poet takes refuge in classical myth, I usually suspect that resorting to Bulfinch is a way of dealing with days at the desk when nothing much is going on. Wetzsteon, however, does some of her best work in witty poems on Proserpine, Pomona, and Marsyas, legendary master of the flute whom Apollo, a bad sport after besting him in a musical competition, flayed to death. At least there's no doubt where these stories are coming from.

Lord knows what controversial subjects amount to these days, but Brad Leithauser has rarely shied away from them. I recall the merciless flak he caught some years ago for having written a poem about a summer job as a tennis instructor. The ensuing outrage gave the impression that the only jobs—teaching creative writing aside—that a poet could safely confess to were as a Vista volunteer or a manual laborer in Levinetown. Leithauser has since learned his lesson, sticking to safe titles like "After the Detonation of the Moon" in *The Odd Last Thing She Did*.[5] Leithauser's earlier books have been characterized by some rather

[5] THE ODD LAST THING SHE DID, by *Brad Leithauser*. Alfred A. Knopf. $22.00.

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too soft love poems and some rather too picturesque landscape work (a chance allusion to Ruisdael is a telling one); the former is in evidence here, though it's hard not to like

> I come
> upon you, slyly deep in foliage,
> sheltering from the sun,
> dipping hot red feet in a bouldered stream,
> three buttons of your blouse undone.

In the latter case, Leithauser's descriptive poems have taken on more edge: one describes a contemporary sunrise on the Shiloh battlefield, where the emblematic gray of mist and blue of sky "disappear / in the uncontainable outpour / of another spill of red"; another, set in the tropics, speaks of "islands like / outgrown root-cramped pots, where survival's / a business of waxing large enough / to asphyxiate your rivals."

Leithauser has consistently handled family history with verve. I recall an early poem about a crackpot-inventor uncle; here he laments the "Death of the Family Archivist," the sole repository of answers to relatives' *ubi sunt?*:

> Who
> sent the starter's crank winging through
> the windshield of his sluggish Model T?
> Who eloped with Phil "the Bill" Hill?
> Who stole his grandma's silver? Whose
> son starved at Andersonville?

The book's two most ambitious poems are narratives: "Very," the biography of a reprobate great aunt whose photograph and exploits held sexual allure for the young poet, and the haunting title poem, which details the mysterious suicide by drowning of a young woman in 1953 (Leithauser doesn't reveal the family connection, if any). The "odd last thing she did" was to leave her car running atop the darkened seaside cliff:

> Soon, whether
> She's found or not, her lights will draw
> Moths and tiny dark-winged things that might
> Be dirt-clumps, ashes. Come what may,
> The night will be lovely, as she foresaw,
> The first stars easing through the blue,
> Engine and ocean breathing together.

There is, of course, no answer to the mystery, but the question is compelling enough to make this a poem worth revisiting.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

# All That Jazz

AS THE MILLENNIUM NEARS, WRITERS ABOUT AMERICAN JAZZ have been especially busy surveying the terrain of eight decades and more, describing and evaluating yet again the major achievements as well as unearthing the minor, agreeable talents that have slipped into obscurity. Two years ago Ted Gioia, in *The History of Jazz*, gave us a compact, well-written and well-selected account—in 400 pages—of jazz from New Orleans to the present. Now the able Gary Giddins, music critic for many years on *The Village Voice*, and Richard Sudhalter, co-author of a biography of Bix Beiderbecke, have produced hefty tomes combining the fruits of far-ranging intelligent listening with social and historical acuity.[1] Mr. Sudhalter's book has as well the virtue of frequent musical illustrations that put in front of our eyes and ears a particular instrumental solo or comparison of solos. This of course has the good effect of sending one to the turntable and disc player by way of confirmation. So my only regret was at the size of my record collection, a good one, but hardly equipped to produce everything alluded to here. Accepting that limitation along with the fact that there is far too much, in Giddins and Sudhalter, to take adequate account of, I fell back on Wordsworth's lines from "Tintern Abbey" and read the books "not only with the sense / Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts / That in this moment there is life and food / For future years."

The two jazz critics from this century's latter half with whom Giddins and Sudhalter may be compared are Whitney Balliett and Gunther Schuller. Or at least they figure as indispensable analysts of hot music who have been of much listening use to me and I presume to other literary types who listen to jazz. Balliett's slew of books, appearing over the past forty years, most of them made up of his pieces in *The New Yorker*, contain countless artful descriptions of (as one of his titles has it) "The Sound of Surprise"—of the soloists and solos jazz has produced. If you want the verbal equivalent of a Sid Catlett drum break, or a cornet solo by Beiderbecke or Buck Clayton, Balliett is your man. (Interestingly he is not once alluded to by Giddins, who as a journalist himself may feel slightly competitive.) Gunther Schuller's two books, *Early Jazz* (1968)

[1] VISIONS OF JAZZ: The First Century, by *Gary Giddins*. Oxford University Press. $35.00. LOST CHORDS: White Musicians and Their Contributions to Jazz, 1915–1945, by *Richard Sudhalter*. Oxford University Press. $35.00. Much credit is due Sheldon Meyer of Oxford for his making the press a pioneer in the field of writing on jazz. (In addition to Giddins and Sudhalter, Oxford has published Ted Gioia, Gunther Schuller and James Lincoln Collier.)

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and *The Swing Era* (1989) are, especially the latter, encyclopedic in the musicians, groups, and compositions treated; also systematic in their musical and musicological "readings" of particular pieces and sequences. Both Giddins and Sudhalter—especially the latter—frequently refer to Schuller's work, Sudhalter often by way of intelligent disagreement. But their approaches to jazz share one central agreement: that of putting the emphasis on listening, in the faith that language about what is heard, if strenuously and delicately used, can tell us much about the musical performance.

Gary Giddins is a jaunty writer, not averse to humor by way of putting iron in his style. "As jazz saunters past its one hundredth anniversary," he says in the introduction to *Visions of Jazz*, the music has a favorable press and is good at attracting Big Money to subsidize festivals, partly by way of a reaction to the more dangerous Rock. At the same time it isn't producing many household names. Giddins quotes himself in an earlier book from 1985: "Few educated Americans can name even five jazz musicians under the age of forty." (He suggests that the average listener will blank out after mentioning Wynton Marsalis and perhaps a couple of others.) Whereas in 1960, Giddins notes "the roll of active musicians under the age of forty" included Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Stan Getz, Charles Mingus, Sarah Vaughan, and about twenty-five other well-known names. And indeed the latter stretches of Giddins' book, containing many names from the last couple of decades, marked unknown territory for this listener, an out-of-date mouldy fig/swing era/early bop amalgam whose tastes formed themselves in the late 1940s.

Giddins' taste is admirably catholic, and he delights in making the best case for his individual subjects, admiring strengths rather than deploring weaknesses. Although in his introduction he disclaims pretensions to writing a history of jazz, and mentions all the significant figures he hasn't discussed (his book is in fact a compendium of articles and reviews, arranged roughly chronologically), the individual sections on Jelly Roll Morton, Armstrong, Ellington (in three parts), Coleman Hawkins, Pee Wee Russell, Chick Webb, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and many others, are substantial enough exercises in life-and-works appreciation to count as a serious introduction to the music. And when he addresses himself to an extended piece of analysis, the results are impressive, perhaps the showcase here being a transcription and description of Parker's amazing solo on "Koko" (1945). That solo takes a little over four pages to transcribe, a much more leisurely effect than is made by the music itself about which Giddins says

> The tempo is brutally fast (♪ = 300–310) but despite the speed and the general impression of volatility, Parker colors his solo with ingenious conceits, such as the clanging riff in measures five to eight; the dramatic, arpeggiated figure in bars thirty-three to thirty-four; the casual reference to the piccolo obbligato from "High Society" and its development at the outset of the second chorus (bars sixty-five to seventy) . . .

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And on in this manner, while the reader tries to keep track, breathlessly following along. Then the summation:

> Note, too, the extended rests, the unexpected places where phrases begin and end, and the range of the solo, which climbs to high G . . . down to an E-flat below middle C . . . Parker's sound is fat and sensuous yet jagged and hard, utterly unlike the cultivated approach of his great predecessors on alto, Johnny Hodges and Benny Carter.

Bernard Shaw once mocked the pedantry of music critics who "parsed" their subject as comparable literary pedants might have parsed Shakespeare's "To Be or Not to Be." But in fact Giddins' directings and pointings, if we take the time to follow them as we listen to the solo, get at what's indeed there in the music. And compared to the musicological and diagrammatical complexities of many of Gunther Schuller's illustrations, this one on "Koko" is a piece of cake.

In addition, Giddins has chapters on figures who don't spring to mind in our visions of jazz. There is a fine appreciation of Irving Berlin, including admiring paragraphs on *Annie Get Your Gun*, Berlin at his very best in "purebred ballads" like "They Say It's Wonderful" and "I Got Lost in His Arms" (the latter an especially beautiful and underrated number), or "remarkable sunny soliloquies" like "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun" and "I Got the Sun in the Morning." I was pleased also to be reintroduced to someone I haven't listened to since, delightedly, I did so in high school days: Spike Jones and his City Slickers who gave us such immortal tracks as "Hawaiian War Chant" and "The Glow Worm," in which "a battery of percussive proxies and vocal sounds" managed to portray "the entire panoply of bodily functions." As Giddins truly puts it: "Like no other musician before or since, Spike had the upper and lower digestive tracts covered." Invariably in this book, when I had in my ears the musical number to which Giddins is referring, I found my own sense confirmed, a major exception occurring when he speaks about what seems to me Fletcher Henderson's greatest single record, "The Stampede" (1925), and calls it—in some inexplicable failure of hearing—"starchy and unswinging."

Richard Sudhalter's book, the product of exhaustive, prolonged research and listening (the richly informed footnotes themselves occupy nearly 100 pages), has a thesis, or at least an overriding motive driving it; namely, that in recognizing the central contribution made by black American musicians to the history of jazz—especially when the recognizing is done under a multicultural aegis—the contributions of white American musicians have been slighted. In his introduction he describes the distortion thus:

> Applied to jazz history, such thinking has spawned a view of early white efforts as musically insignificant and—particularly in the 1920s and '30s—vastly overpublicized. Jazz, says the now accepted canon, is black; there have been no white innovators, few white soloists of real

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distinction; the best white musicians (with an exception or two) were only dilute copies of black originals, and in any case exerted lasting influence only on other white musicians.

Sudhalter's efforts are made in the conviction that jazz music "may not be so much a black American experience as an *American* experience, with various racial and ethnic groups playing indispensable and interlocking roles." So that it was natural, rather than surprising, for Louis Armstrong to love Bunny Berigan's trumpet or Bobby Hackett's cornet playing, or the sound of Jack Teagarden's trombone; it was unsurprising that Coleman Hawkins' favorite band was Glen Gray's Casa Loma Orchestra: unsurprising that white musicians like Beiderbecke, Adrian Rollini, Miff Mole, Frank Trumbauer, Dave Tough, Bud Freeman, Pee Wee Russell and many others were held in more than respect by black jazzmen. The tale Sudhalter sets out to tell—and tell it he does, brilliantly—is of jazz as "a picaresque tale of cooperation, mutual admiration, cross-fertilization; comings-together and driftings-apart, all *despite*, rather than because of, the segregation of the larger society."

Over the long stretch of pages, Sudhalter artfully combines biography and historical-social commentary with enthusiastic, informed treatments of the different musicians, small combos, and larger New Orleans and swing bands, from early groups like the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB) and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings (NORK), up to the various notable bands of Artie Shaw in the late 1930s and beyond. (Sudhalter has promised a further volume dealing with forties and post-forties jazz.) His eclecticism shows itself in the conviction that in the "short rapid evolution of jazz, new styles and approaches seem to supplement, rather than supplant their predecessors." I found this particularly enlightening, since it got me listening to sides I'd forgotten I owned, to the "New York"-based style of the late 1920s and beyond, first as led by the entrepreneurial trumpet player Red Nichols, and his frequent sidekick Miff Mole—before the arrival of Teagarden, the hottest of white trombonists. Red Nichols and the Five Pennies, Miff Mole and the Little Molers (splendid name for a band!), and the Charleston Chasers made recordings on which can be heard musicians who haven't had their due: pianists such as Arthur Schutt and Lennie Hayton; the tenor sax man and arranger Fud Livingston; the guitar virtuoso Dick McDonough; Jimmy Dorsey, a capable alto sax "hot" man before he became a bandleader; Russell on clarinet; the drummer Vic Berton; Eddie Lang and Joe Venuti on guitar and violin respectively. One of the greatest delights of these records is the performance of Adrian Rollini on bass sax, first in the California Ramblers band of the middle 1920s, then with Mole and Nichols, and on many sides with Beiderbecke small groups. Adrian Rollini managed, in his firm, swinging fullness, to make the unwieldy bass sax sound quite different from the "dyspeptic bullfrog" noises that lesser players produced. Rollini also experimented with the Couesnophone, a Paris product that was "a kind of harmonica in the shape of a toy saxophone." Dubbed the "goofus," Rollini played solos on it in various Ramblers performances. Part of what makes Sudhalter fun

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to read is his willingness to describe the virtues and limitations of instruments we don't think too much about—like the bass and C-melody saxophone (the latter as played by Trumbauer), or the xyplophone-marimba and the vibraphone, as played by Red Norvo. There is a chapter devoted to guitars and guitarists. Throughout the book Sudhalter keeps us in touch with the physical realities of instrumental performance and does so with relish.

Although it's a simplification, New York white jazz, in the persons of Nichols, Mole, Rollini, and their cohorts, had a somewhat angular quality, featuring solos that were tightly organized and punched out in staccato lines. Something analogous can be heard in the Bob Crosby band of the 1930s, which Sudhalter makes a strong case for as producing an ensemble "most certainly contrapuntal, wholly linear, its texture dependent on the melodic parity of its components." There is a different, cooler sound to such music than the "hot" brilliance of Armstrong, Hawkins, and other great black soloists. But as Sudhalter reminds us, no "period" style was there for long—new approaches supplemented, but didn't supplant older ones. In his recording dates, Nichols made excellent use of new musicians, especially ones arriving from Chicago—Goodman, Bud Freeman, Gene Krupa, the Teagardens, Glenn Miller and others—who turn up on these dates and make for original sounds, shifting styles. The point may be, as in the words of one musician quoted here, to keep out of one another's way while occasionally straying into that way.

Sudhalter's assiduity in making comparative distinctions among solos and soloists is exemplary, as when he provides three different choruses by the tenor sax man Bud Freeman of "China Boy" (1928, 1939, 1957), in order to show the "refinement process" they demonstrate. His remarks about the process are detailed and doubtless accurate; I say "doubtless" because I own none of these recordings of "China Boy," and to follow the illustrated solo by hearing it in one's head or playing it on the piano is difficult if not impossible to do. (I did much better with an illustrated comparison of Trumbauer's and Beiderbecke's solos on the 1929 Whiteman recording of the tune, familiar to me.) This is just to say that all you need to use Sudhalter's material to the full is more time and more records: his is a book at the furthest extreme from something to be read and digested "all at once." Sometimes I can't share his high enthusiasm for an artist: he especially loves Bud Freeman's playing (the chapter on Freeman ends with Sudhalter paying him a visit when he was near death), calling him "one of the three significant tenor styles of the 1930's" (along with Hawkins and Lester Young). I've listened to enough Freeman (and heard him in person) to be bothered by what sounds to these ears like frequently out-of-tune playing; but Sudhalter admits that opinion about Freeman tends to be polarized.

The heart of the book for me is the chapter titled "Bix Beiderbecke and His Friends," where the great man's career is reviewed, with abundant musical examples, by way of bringing out what Sudhalter calls

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the "inner voice" so strongly and unmistakably heard in the cornetist's recordings with the Jean Goldkette Orchestra, with Trumbauer and other pickup groups, with the Whiteman band. A number of critics, including Sudhalter himself, have written well about Beiderbecke[2] and have, at one point or another, realized that they must move into some sort of verbal poetry to convey the sense of his playing. Here is Otis Ferguson in 1940 addressing himself to this matter of Beiderbecke's "voice":

> Perhaps you will have to hear him a lot, perhaps you won't have any ear for the jazz music that grew up around you and in your time, and so will never hear the voice, almost as if speaking: but there is something in these records that goes beyond a mere instrument or the improviser on it, some unconquerable bright spirit that leaves no slops even in confusion and defeat and darkness gathering; some gallant human thing which is as near to us as it is completely marvelous . . . something, grown in this country out of the Iowa dirt, that didn't die and could not be buried so long as there should be a record left in the world and a turntable to spin it on.

Compelling, sentimental, or both? But Sudhalter, along with quoting these words, goes beyond the "completely marvelous," "unconquerable bright spirit" direction. He is bold enough, for example, to compare Beiderbecke with Armstrong, even the most magnificent of whose solos, he argues, "are emotional monoliths; they make their statements plainly, unequivocally, unalloyed by contrasting or contradictory impulses." Except for perhaps not noting enough how Armstrong's great solos (as in "Struttin' with Some Barbeque") *build* in intensity as one brilliant musical idea and technique leads to another, this statement seems fair and interesting. Beiderbecke's best solos do give us that sense of "contrasting or contradictory impulses" being explored, as a way of "looking *within* every piece of material, regardless of tempo or surface character." Sudhalter extends the comparison, not just to Armstrong but to other great black soloists, by considering Beiderbecke's great solo on "Singin' the Blues" (1927) as touchstone for his peculiar "inner voice":

> The tone is that of a brass-band cornetist—clean, ringing, silvery, every note struck head-on. Colorational devices . . . growls, buzzes, smears, half-valve effects—occur seldom; even vibrato, where present at all, is feather-light, dramatic contrast to its expressive prominence in the work of Armstrong, Bechet, Johnny Dodds and others.

[2] Including William H. Youngren, whose excellent "Bix," in part a review of Sudhalter's biography, appeared in *The Hudson Review*, Volume XXVIII, Number 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 87–96.

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And he proceeds to illustrate and describe the texture and logic of the solo. That Sudhalter is an excellent trumpet player may help make his appreciation of Beiderbecke especially telling, except that he writes with equal ease about sax, trombone, and percussions.

There are a number of informative and fully-packed chapters after the Beiderbecke one, including ones on Bunny Berigan, on Red Norvo and Mildred Bailey, on Bobby Hackett, and a concluding chapter on Jack Teagarden and Pee Wee Russell, two musical geniuses Sudhalter seems to have special affection for, and why not? Since he has deferred 1940s big band music until the subsequent volume, his treatment of later 1930s big bands is confined to Goodman and Artie Shaw. And since the Goodman consists only of an earlier published interview with the King, it's the Shaw chapter that's of particular interest. Sudhalter plays him off against Goodman, comparing their respective solos on "It Had to Be You," but also bringing out their differences as clarinetists and as bandleaders. Shaw's playing, as it developed in the late 1930s, exemplifies what Sudhalter calls "Apollonian ideals"—"logic, structural integrity, melodic balance, harmonic subtlety, introspection, emotional restraint, and great tonal beauty"—and Sudhalter places him in the line of Bix and Trumbauer. He quotes a revealing comment of Shaw on the difference in attitude toward music between him and Goodman: "To me [said Shaw] listening to Benny talk about the clarinet was like listening to a surgeon getting hung up on a scalpel. He was totally tied up in it, to the exclusion of all else. He'd point at the horn and say, 'This thing will never let you down.' " Shaw found that strange, since for him mastery of the clarinet was "a way to get to something, to realize a greater goal." There is further lively speculation on the difference between the two as leaders, Goodman's band a collection of vivid individuals producing an overall chemistry that was exciting; Shaw's by contrast, molded by the person of the leader into a unit, with arrangements that emphasized "balance, placement of solos, matters of key, texture, and ensemble density"—ways of voicing each section.

Like the other treatments in this book, the chapter on Artie Shaw sends you back to the recordings with new anticipation and curiosity. It is this activity that is the main fruit of what, in a short epilogue, Sudhalter calls "the vast and sprawling chronicle" he has written. Almost without thinking about it, we assent to his concluding assertions that jazz is "profoundly pluralistic" and that the "blacks invented, whites appropriated" way of thinking is based on "ignorance or willful misreading." In fact perhaps the best praise of this book is that, in the countless, sometimes bewildering examples of musical performance it considers, we pretty much forget—in our lively engagement with those examples and what Sudhalter does with them—about the overall thesis impelling the project. Instead we have been, without knowing it, under the directive of Armstrong's much-quoted if apocryphal remark to Teagarden, which Sudhalter quotes once more in his Introduction: "You an Ofay, I'm a Spade—let's blow."

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TOM WILHELMUS

# Epater les Bourgeois!

TO SHOCK THE MIDDLE CLASS. To "flatten" its nose. Long ago, when we were members of the old left or the old right, we felt that shocking the middle class was our reason for living. We scorned its ignorance and stupidity, its lack of taste or intellect or imagination, its preoccupation with money, its puritan hypocrisy, its lack of idealism, its self-loathing and doubt. We found it self-satisfied and boring. "How Beastly the Bourgeois Is," said D.H. Lawrence, and we agreed. How, like Buñuel, we loved to thumb our noses at its "discreet charm."

Yet today, by all accounts, the middle class has won. The end of history has arrived; representative democracy and market capitalism are universally acclaimed. Other systems of government, other economies, belief in the superiority of one class over another, in one race over another, in one religion or art or culture over another are all *passé* (throwbacks to the contrary notwithstanding). In the "global economy" we are all one. How can we thumb our nose at the middle class when we share the same nose?

Just so, in Andre Dubus III's new novel, *House of Sand and Fog,*[1] the plot turns precisely on that emblem of middle-class sovereignty, a suburban bungalow high on a hillside overlooking the Pacific in Corona, California. It is a modest place, a tract house on a dead-end street, but from its deck—if the day is good and not shrouded in the nearly ubiquitous fog—the view is said to be "good" (and therefore marketable). And for all of these reasons, the house becomes the center of a tragedy, one in which two families fighting over its possession are led to mayhem and death.

A woman, a relapsing alcoholic and former drug addict, has, we are told, neglected to open her mail, part of the exasperating deluge of apparent trivia that fills her mailbox everyday. She has been in a stupor since her co-dependent husband left; now she clings to the house itself, a gift that belonged to her family. Nonetheless, she has ignored a notice from San Mateo County either to pay her back taxes or face having the house seized and sold at auction. And so it is, at a reduced price, roughly a third of its actual value.

The buyer, an Iranian who was formerly a wealthy and highly-placed colonel in the Shah's air force, has been supporting himself and his family through a variety of menial jobs while attempting to regain a sense of dignity and self-worth. When he purchases the house with the

[1] HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG, by *Andre Dubus III.* W.W. Norton & Co. $24.95.

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remainder of his life's savings, he believes he can perhaps make some money and regain some lost status.

Dubus, a brilliant storyteller (son of the late writer with the same name who died in February), captures completely this "clash of cultures": the pride in work and in his own self-sufficiency in the Iranian colonel as well as the self-loathing and doubt in the woman, Kathy Nicolo, whose lower-middle-class outlook and behavior (typically "American"?) are based on modest good looks, an appetite for alcohol and drugs, and an easy ability to put out. Indeed, over the next few days she acquires a new boyfriend, a police officer named Lester Burdon, who appears, for reasons buried deep in his childhood, to suffer from a compulsive need to save women. Thus, real estate and dignity—two extremes of bourgeois value—are guaranteed to come into conflict. And what seeks to be a novel-of-the-nineties about conflicting cultures and the turmoil they generate cannot escape being principally about property values.

Similarly, *Empress of the Splendid Season*,[2] a new novel by Oscar Hijuelos, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, continues the author's investigations of the lives of Cuban immigrant families in New York City since the Castro revolution. Like most of Hijuelos' stories, this one centers on the efforts of the principal character to reclaim the middle-class identity she lost when moving to the United States. Lydia España, beautiful young daughter of a provincial Cuban mayor, thrown out of the country by her father just before the revolution because of a sexual indiscretion, finds herself working in a sweatshop, then married to Raul, a kind but humble waiter, and eventually becomes (after Raul's heart attack) a cleaning lady for wealthy New Yorkers on the Upper East Side. All the while she seeks to raise her two children, Alicia and Rico, in a manner similar to her own upbringing.

Lydia yearns for a past that seems more vibrant and interesting than the life she presently endures. At the same time, she cherishes the sense of community and fellowship she finds in her neighborhood and worries that her children will lose touch with it as they are assimilated more and more into the broader American culture. Mostly she is obsessed with making ends meet while maintaining a sense of dignity and pride. Through its record of Lydia's modest triumphs, humiliations, passions and regrets, *Empress of the Splendid Season* seeks to convey the very texture of an ordinary life experienced under these difficult circumstances.

And for the most part it does so although, amid subject matter that aspires to be Dickensian, Hijuelos' portrayal seems often too decent, too tolerant, too tender and morose. Lydia's own eccentricities are too predictable and, among the variety of other characters she meets—Eliseo, the local communist bookseller, Mr. Fuentes, the local butcher with a secret hobby as a poet, Mr. Osprey a wealthy client for whom Lydia holds a quiet but unfulfilled yearning, a neighbor who is an

[2] EMPRESS OF THE SPLENDID SEASON, by *Oscar Hijuelos*. HarperCollins. $25.00.

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amateur singer, another who is an amateur historian—none seems truly remarkable or entertaining. Hijuelos' skills as a novelist strike me as indisputable and his works eminently readable and interesting, but his stories never appear to rise above the conditions he describes, and his books, like his characters, seem to dwell nostalgically on the past and on "fitting in."

In contrast, Doris Lessing's new book, *Mara and Dann*,[3] continues to mine an apocalyptic and futuristic vein for which the author in recent years has become more and more noted. This novel, subtitled "An Adventure," is the twenty-fifth work of fiction in Lessing's long career, a career now noted for its wide swings in subject matter and style—communism in the thirties and forties, psychological realism in the fifties, women's rights always—as well as for excursions into mysticism and science fiction. Most recently the eighty-year-old author has published a rather straightforward novel of late love, entitled *Love, Again*, as well as two volumes of autobiography, *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade*. Now she has again indulged a taste for thumbing her nose at the status quo by making Western culture the victim of a climatological disaster.

*Mara and Dann* takes place thousands of years in the future when a great ice age has destroyed civilization and wreaked havoc on the social systems of the southern hemisphere, including Africa (now called "Ifrik") where the action takes place. It tells the story of a sister and brother who leave their desert home in the south and travel north seeking water and safety. Along the way, they encounter hunger and thirst, wild beasts (including mutant scorpions and reptiles), slavery, prostitution, warfare, and even the possibility they will be used for breeding. From their childhood, Mara and Dann have been rumored to be members of the nobility, survivors of an extinct ruling class. In part their journey is to test their worthiness and their ultimate decision to accept or reject the authority and responsibility that have been reserved for them.

Part of the pleasure of reading *Mara and Dann* is to observe, as in *Mad Max*, changes that have occurred in the landscape, weather, tools, technology, culture, and language that remain after the collapse of our own era. Such satire obviously carries the message that nothing will ultimately save the human race from changes in climate or from its own propensity for violence and self-destruction. Lessing, however, is less interested in the abstract scientific or economic consequences of such changes than their effect on politics, domestic arrangements, and gender. Her portrayal of Mara, for example, centers on the latter's emerging intelligence and inquisitiveness and certain eternal questions pertaining to femininity—fertility, fear of rape, choice of male companionship, loyalty toward one's brother. It includes a description of Mara's desire for a safe home life and her somewhat conflicting desire to become a successful leader among the various populations she comes in

[3] MARA AND DANN, by *Doris Lessing*. HarperCollins. $25.00.

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contact with. Dann, a handsome victim who is incapable of wisdom or understanding, is Mara's male foil in this exploration.

Long and episodic, *Mara and Dann* concludes with a "cultivate our garden" episode that mirrors the domesticated preoccupations of its author. Like Voltaire, whose pessimistic and apocalyptic view of mankind's future she seems to share, she imagines that the best we can hope for is a safe haven, under reduced circumstances, among a close circle of companions while the life of greed and corruption, of buying and selling and destruction goes on around us.

Aharon Appelfeld's new book, *The Conversion*,[4] opens with the main character Karl's decision to convert from Judaism to Roman Catholicism, a decision he hopes will allow him to become a municipal manager in his provincial Austrian city. For Karl, who is a Jew in Hapsburg Austria, it is a small step, one that has been taken by many others before him, and in fact it does allow him to win the coveted position he seeks. Interestingly, Appelfeld centers the plot not on the act of betrayal of self and heritage the ceremony connotes but rather upon the opportunity it provides. Karl had grown up in modest but comfortable circumstances, was successful and athletic in school, and although for financial reasons he had been unable to attend the university, he had reasonably high expectations for himself and his friends. He had not regarded himself as much different from any of his classmates, Christian or Jewish. His conversion, therefore, had seemed a logical next step. Afterwards, however, it gives him an opportunity to reflect for the first time on his Jewish heritage and the manner in which Jews as a class have been treated. Only then does he begin to realize the hypocrisy and irrelevance of the middle-class life he and his fellow professionals and businessmen have been leading, a life that is neurotic, unappealing, rootless, and inhumanly competitive. Later, he remembers the half-forgotten pleasures of childhood and even takes up with the woman who had been his nursemaid early on. Eventually, he even leaves the city seeking an idyllic return to village life in the remote Jewish town, the birthplace of his parents.

What gives these events their particularly resonant character is the parable-like manner in which Appelfeld undertakes this minute analysis of bourgeois life and its particular deceits and delusions. Nor is this unfamiliar territory, relying as it does on history and a style already well-known through the works of other Central European writers and intellectuals—Freud, Kafka, and Musil spring immediately to mind—works classic in their familiarity. The style is ironic, allegorical, existential and yet about subjects domesticated and mundane, a style in which a petty bourgeois salesman might wake up one morning to discover that he had turned into a bug.

Appelfeld himself grew up in Czernowitz, a city in a remote part of the Hapsburg Empire (it also produced the poet Paul Célan), and was a survivor of the concentration camps before moving to Palestine after the

[4] THE CONVERSION, by *Aharon Appelfeld*. Trans. by *Jeffrey M. Green*. Schocken Books. $22.00.

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war. He has lived in Israel ever since and writes in Hebrew. By ending *The Conversion* on a note of qualified grace—of Karl's momentary reconciliation with himself and his heritage—he knows, even without mentioning the collapse of the Hapsburg Empire and the subsequent rise of the Nazi era, just how brief this pause before the storm will be.

At the end of Katharine Weber's new novel *The Music Lesson*,[5] the protagonist, an art historian named Patricia Dolan, is forced to watch while terrorist members of an I.R.A. splinter group destroy a precious Vermeer belonging to the Queen of England. With Dolan's help, the group has stolen the Vermeer and held it for ransom, and when the ransom is not forthcoming they decide to destroy the painting as a statement of the lengths to which they will go to promote their cause. The leader of the terrorists is Mickey O'Driscoll, Dolan's distant cousin, who has recruited her for this operation by becoming her lover and by preying upon some of her greatest vulnerabilities. The latter includes her love for her father, an Irish-American devoted to the republican cause, whom she wishes to please; her personal loss of an only child and subsequent divorce; a rapturous belief in the old country; and a rather innocent belief in the career she has chosen in art history. O'Driscoll offers romance and adventure and Irishness. Besides, he needs her expertise if he is to pull the job off successfully. The end of this novella-length story contains her disillusionment (as well as her canny instinct for retribution and survival) and a lesson perhaps in the healing powers of art.

When the novel begins, Dolan is guarding the Vermeer (which has already been stolen) in a remote cottage on the Cork coast. Her journal, through which the story is told, provides the means to record her impressions of the beautiful countryside and its inhabitants and to understand herself and the adventure she is engaged in. Ultimately, it provides a way to reconcile her outward behavior with her inward convictions. The Vermeer becomes an important part in the process: thinking about the woman in the painting becomes a means for Dolan to think about herself.

In a work too short by half, *The Music Lesson* provides a challenging thesis that is made even more seductive by the gracefulness of Weber's prose. We would like to believe it was true: that a love of art would alter our perceptions and make us wise, less vulnerable to deception and more self-sufficient. Vermeer, the master of subtle visual effects and safe, circumscribed content, would be the perfect choice for revealing this quiet and civilizing message to us. The alternative is to believe that art itself may be a form of seduction to which we—members of the polite bourgeoisie—are particularly vulnerable. I must say, I'm less convinced by Dolan's arguments regarding these matters than by Weber's skill in having put the issues before us.

Finally, we come to a novel whose understanding of the plight of the middle class is at once the most thoughtful, comprehensive, and

[5] THE MUSIC LESSON, by *Katharine Weber*. Crown Publishers, Inc. $21.00.

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sympathetic. *Gain*[6] by Richard Powers does not undertake to shock the middle class so much as to pity it and in doing so seeks out the roots of some of its principal dilemmas. Throughout his career Powers, one of our most intellectually ambitious writers, has sought to understand the fate of the ordinary individual among the many forces—both intellectual and physical—that overwhelm him today. Whether writing about semiotics and cultural history (*Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance*), radiation poisoning and popular culture (*Prisoner's Dilemma*), genetics and information technology (*The Gold Bug Variations*), a children's ward in a futuristic hospital (*Operation Wandering Soul*), or artificial intelligence (*Galatea 2.2*), he has created a view of history and materiality as a layered totality, a CD-ROM whose asynchronous influences threaten to swamp the individual and make him or her irrelevant. This sentiment is perhaps best captured in a passage from *The Gold Bug Variations*:

> The sanctity of one life, the primacy of the particular, has no place in the new science. Biology has united ecology, taxonomy, paleontology, and genetics in a single grand theory of encoded nucleotides, but in doing so, it lays bare terminal grimness. Gene, organism, and tribe operate by opposing means, are driven by inimical goals. The individual is a myth of scale.

In *Gain* this message is contained in the story of an imaginary corporation, Clare, which Powers has invented as a way of exploring the effect such institutions have on our lives, and the story of a single individual, Laura Bodey, the most representative of middle Americans one might imagine. The interwoven tales of these two entities are the measure of what we have become.

Like any number of real corporations (Dupont and Procter & Gamble are the most immediate parallels), Clare has grown over its two-hundred-year history into an organization which dominates the lives of thousands. From its beginning in soap and candle manufacturing on the Eastern seaboard to its current status as a major international conglomerate making consumer, agricultural, and chemical products, the corporation has simply taken advantage of the laws of corporate growth and the opportunities confronting it as an economic entity. As Stephen Jay Gould might say, such evolution is contingent, a consequence of basic laws so mixed with accident and opportunity that any attempt to predict what they might become would be impossible. And Powers does suggest that corporations are, in fact, "without qualification, the most remarkable and successful invention in the history of democratic peoples. . . [and] pay for a quarter of public undertakings at all levels, provide half of all jobs, produce two thirds of all payroll, and an even greater proportion of total national wealth" (from a Clare president's stump

[6] GAIN, by *Richard Powers*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $25.00.

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speech). The reality they represent is overwhelming, far outstripping any one individual's ability to comprehend or control.

Not that its products are always profoundly necessary. Among Clare's modern-day products is a disposable camera, end result of a confluence of chemistry, technology, business, economic and intellectual forces operating worldwide to produce a single, trivial item. Yet its provenance is richly complex and, in a way, more interesting than the people who produce it. Powers calls the camera, "A disposable miracle, no less than the least of us."

We are not as convinced of the miraculous qualities of an equally disposable by-product of the Clare success story, Laura Bodey, a divorced housewife and realtor living in Lacewood, Illinois—a Clare company town—who is dying of ovarian cancer, which may or may not be the result of plant emissions or the Clare-produced fertilizers and weed killers with which she treats her garden.

Laura offers Powers the challenge of bringing to life the most ordinary of ordinary citizens whose fate we must see clearly if we wish to see ourselves and our circumstances complete. A soccer mom with teenage kids and a married lover, the language she speaks and the opinions she sports seem the product of our techno-computerized TV-dominated lives. She has a good heart but does not seem terribly bright and would be easy to dismiss. Only the description of her chemotherapy and death, which are treated with meticulous exactitude, brings her into focus and shows her to be the victim of forces, anonymous, confusing, and inevitable, which dominate our lives. Although the rate of cancer in Lacewood has risen dramatically and affects more and more of Laura's and her children's friends, she seems only mildly interested in the class-action suit her ex-husband urges her to join. Her doctors treat her case like what it is, a statistical event which more or less conforms to other statistical events with similar circumstances; and lost amid a sea of estimated outcomes and probabilities, she can only listen patiently to her fellow sufferers and seek modest comfort in small rewards:

> Some days, she feels a little breeze, even through the sealed plate glass. Life is so big, so blameless, so unexpected. Existence lies past price, beyond scarcity. It breaks the law of supply and demand. All things that fail to work will vanish, and life remain. Lovely lichen will manufacture soil on the sunroof of the World Trade.

The poetry, as they say, is in the pity. And, more than most writers, Powers is able to remind us that average life can claim our attention, before it sinks back into the larger forces that created it. At times, however, such pity seems like our pity for Woyzeck: much ado over little more than a plate of peas. At times we ask why we document these middle-class adventures with their Oprah-like lives and their tragedies *manquées*. Then we regret our descent into mediocrity and long for better times, times when we could shout, Epater les Bourgeois!

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ROBERT McDOWELL

# A Rare Moment for All of Us

FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, friends my age and I talked about what it must have been like to be an American in the decade before our births. As children we craved our parents' stories about growing up in the slowly fading shadow of the Great Depression, and thrilled to their tales of military service that followed the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Often in our backyard games, we reenacted their mostly imagined heroic deeds (imagined because our elders were strangely, maddeningly modest about their war records). Later, when we were lucky enough to coax them, we listened with equal enthusiasm to the World War II stories of older friends.

Theirs was one of only two times (the other being, however misunderstood, the period of westward expansion and settlement), outside our own, that we truly envied. It is foolishness, certainly, to yearn too much for any time beyond one's own, but our parents' time was *so* different. *The Greatest Generation*, by NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw, pays homage to that difference by presenting the stories of some fifty-six war participant-witnesses.[1]

It is impossible not to get a lift from Brokaw's tales. His book is organized into eight chapters in an effort to represent America's World War II experience in all its diversity. "Ordinary People," "Home Front," and "Love, Marriage, and Commitment" chronicle fifteen stories of individuals we might call "Just Plain Folks." Another chapter documents the great contributions of women who served in the military, and women who held the country together back home. One chapter, appropriately called "Shame," honestly reports our country's cruel and hypocritical racist attitudes, which even marred the otherwise brilliant record of the military. There are also two chapters, "Famous People" and "The Arena," made up of seventeen prose snapshots of celebrities and politicians.

The coming-of-age rituals of this generation involved not only a personal crossroads, but definitive turning points for their country and humanity itself. Their contributions then, and the world we've inherited, are almost impossible to grasp.

That is why their service and accomplishments continue to fascinate us. Even after we concede the era's shortcomings—racism, gender inequality after the war, particularly in the matter of equal pay for equal

[1] THE GREATEST GENERATION, by *Tom Brokaw.* Random House. $24.95.

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work, and in many, it seems, a dogged conservatism that often veered towards self-righteousness—we are left with the fact that mostly common people, united against a clearly defined, global enemy and transcending motivations of self-interest, pulled together for a short, concentrated period of time, to do uncommon, extraordinary things. What they did added up to nothing less than saving the world from its worst satanic forces. For all the greatness of those who preceded and have come after them, no other twentieth-century generation can make that claim.

That Brokaw's book became an immediate bestseller is only a recent indication that our complicated appetite for the stories of our World War II elders remains hearty. Brokaw's participation in the activities surrounding the fortieth, and later the fiftieth, anniversaries of D-day forms this tribute's *raison d'être.*

"As I walked the beaches," Brokaw begins, "with the American veterans who had landed there and now returned for this anniversary, men in their sixties and seventies, and listened to their stories in the cafés and inns, I was deeply moved and profoundly grateful for all they had done. I realized that they had been all around me as I was growing up and that I had failed to appreciate what they had been through and what they had accomplished."

This act of atonement, then, beginning with Brokaw's childhood memories of growing up on an army base in western South Dakota, is rooted in the deeply personal but evolves to embrace the universal. As a boy, Brokaw can remember ammunition being tested on the prairie surrounding the base. Neighbors came and went to and from the war. There was even a stockade, adjacent to the base, which housed prisoners of war who wandered around "chattering happily in Italian, a curious Mediterranean presence in that barren corner of the Great Plains." Yet, despite this childhood played out in such close proximity to the preparations for the war, Brokaw reminds us that he did not truly understand it, in human terms, for nearly fifty years.

How could he? One cannot help but be sympathetic. Who among us under the age of fifty, say, could drop out of school or quit a job, enlist in the service, and spend up to five years far from home, either preparing for or engaged in some of the bloodiest battles the world has ever known. Who among us would willingly sacrifice a significant chunk of our twenties? Who among us can honestly even imagine it?

This is why it is a good idea to read comments such as this one by Jeanette Gagne Norton: "When they placed that baby in my arms I changed from being a kind of giddy, goofy teenager to being a real responsible person . . . It seems like I matured overnight." This is a serious statement by a woman who bore a child his father would never see because he died fighting in Europe. Her generation lived urgently, coping with fatalism on a daily basis. There might be common ground there as we reflect on our own terrors, real and imagined, of the Cold War, but we only imagined dying, while the people of Gagne's generation *were* dying.

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This critical difference between generations is not lost on Brokaw. Even as he honors the dead, the aging, vanishing survivors and their legacy, he urges everyone who is his age or younger to inherit, and be inspired by, the memories and lessons of that unique era. Foremost among them, perhaps, is modesty. Time and again, Brokaw reminds us that, as horrible as it may have been, this generation simply did what had to be done. Their sense of selflessness comes through in passages like this one:

> They described the scene as calmly as if they were remembering an egg-toss at a Sunday social back home. It was an instructive moment for me, one of many, and so characteristic. The war stories come reluctantly, and they almost never reflect directly on the bravery of the storyteller. Almost always he or she is singling out someone else for praise.

It comes through, too, in Brokaw's inspired observations such as this one, made in an age where one marriage in two ends in divorce: "In many respects, their marriages and the way they conducted them were a form of community service."

In many of these stories, the shape of a common outline for living comes into focus. These were people who, staring into disaster's maw every day, gained (if they survived) an enviable confidence in their resiliency and capabilities. Early on, they learned that nothing could be taken for granted, that little, if anything, would be given to them. Coming home, they were already tested. They were willing and eager to get on with their lives. This desire, combined with a remarkable sense of purpose, propelled them into schools, business, and family life. Theirs was a generation determined to make up for lost time, and as they made their way, perfecting America's move from the farms and cities to the suburbs, no challenges or disappointments could ever surprise them. They had already seen the worst that life—and death—could bring. As one witness here put it, in speaking of her long marriage, "We thought of killing each other, but divorce? Never!"

A lot of us today might find such determination less than admirable. But implicit in this critical view is the danger that lies in comparing too closely one generation to another. Brokaw is diligent in reminding us that the rules have not been, and are not always, the same. The war generation saw firsthand the folly in erasing or revising the past when things do not go as planned, for they matured just as it became clear to the world that there was almost no past or present left to play with.

A book that relies on compact interviews and concise testimonials can quickly bog down in the mud of its potentially cumbersome apparatus. To succeed, the author must deftly organize and edit the materials. The author must also create the sense of sympathy and discovery that is the satisfied reader's reward. Brokaw meets these responsibilities with a

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first-rate journalistic prose, which we might expect from one of the eminent news-shapers of the post-Cronkite age. The book's pace is crisp, the language straightforward and clear. As he appears to be on television, Brokaw the writer is ingratiating, precocious, thorough (if sometimes brief), quick on his feet, and honest. He is perfect for this work, and his effort joins superior books in recent popular history by David Halberstam (*The Fifties*), Roger Kahn (*The Era*), several texts by Studs Terkel, and Andy Rooney's memoir, *My War.*

Rooney is, in fact, a profile here, and as we might expect, his voice is one of mild dissension. Brokaw (who in describing Rooney the war correspondent just so happens to use the same adjectives—"daring and resourceful"—that radio announcer Fred Hoy used to introduce "The Lone Ranger" every week) evokes the "60 Minutes" wit in addressing the complexity of his subjects: "Their varied views on social, diplomatic, and military questions were another affirmation of the independence and skepticism that Andy Rooney admired when they were men in uniform." Though he admires his fellow soldiers Rooney, like many vets, is uneasy about pinning *The Greatest* insignias on their mothballed uniforms. Certainly another collection could include interviews and stories, of which there are no doubt many, portraying American war experiences and aftermaths of crushing failure. In the ultimate kiss-and-tell edition, one could expect to plow through one example of personal disaster after another. *The Greatest Generation* wisely refrains.

It is enough to meet Rooney's gruff view that only disabled or seriously wounded veterans are deserving of special treatment; or to watch him, speaking about the officers and soldiers of the U.S. Army, turn a questionable American characteristic—rebellion against authority—into an odd, interesting asset: "They often improvised, they came up with their own plan, they reacted to what was happening in the field instead of just blindly following orders like the Germans. That's one of the reasons the Germans lost." And when Rooney tells of his shame, on visiting Buchenwald, of ever having considered refusing military service, we are jolted by the realization that not all long looks back are sweetly nostalgic. As billionaire businessman Maurice Greenberg, among the first soldiers to hit the beach on D-day, put it, "War brings out the worst in everyone. No matter how honorable you are . . . things happen that you feel ashamed of later on."

But whether or not the interesting people interviewed here are haunted by their war experiences, or plagued at all by guilt, the stories they tell Brokaw are *good* stories. Their hard-earned postwar lives of achievement, fidelity, and success are indisputable.

At times, at discouraging times, it almost seems that the spirit of selflessness, which shone so bright in the war years' generation and just after, and which flickered anew in the activism of the sixties, has been all but extinguished. We are witnessing, and playing parts in, the creation of a global, corporate conglomerate economy. The media, and a lot of

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our artists, have been telling us for almost two decades that we are selfish and greedy, irresponsible with all but our own interests. E-commerce binds us to our stations in ways that we have never been bound before. On an in-person basis, we interact with fewer people outside our immediate families and small circles of friends. Communities are more difficult to create, or to join or sustain. Our public schools decline as in election after election we vote against spending more money on education. Our marriages, and our families, fail. Perhaps worst of all, the enemies lurk in the shadows. The will to fight may well be paralyzed when one cannot clearly identify one's opponent.

So, is it any wonder that a book like *The Greatest Generation* should rekindle our desire, not so much for the time and circumstances that forged the war generation, but to discover in our own lives its liberating sense of kinship and shared purpose? Summing up his own war experience, Senator Daniel Inouye might have been speaking to the pride and the wishes of millions: "The one time the nation got together was World War II. We stood as one. We clenched our fists as one, and that was a rare moment for all of us."

Our hunger for such things is nothing less than spiritual in its pure intensity.

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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DIANA WEBSTER,* who lives in Helsinki, won the Finnish Play of the Year Award and the Premios Ondas Prize (Barcelona) for her radio drama *So Many Everests*. . . . THOMAS L. JEFFERS,* who teaches in the English Department at Marquette, is the author of *Samuel Butler Revalued* (Penn State Press). . . . ANNE STEVENSON,* who lives in Durham, England, is the author of ten collections of poetry, among them *Collected Poems 1955–1995* published by Oxford University Press. She has been awarded a Cholmondely Prize by the Society of Authors in England. . . . PETER MAKUCK's third book of poetry is *Against Distance* (BOA Editions, Ltd., 1997). . . . CHARLES MARTIN's most recent book is *What the Darkness Proposes* (Johns Hopkins University Press), and he is currently translating Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for W.W. Norton. JOHANNA KELLER* is editor of *Chamber Music,* and her long poem, *The Skull,* was published by The Press at Colorado College in 1998. . . . GEORGE WATSON, who is a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, is the author of *British Literature since 1945* (St. Martin's Press) and *The Lost Literature of Socialism* (Lutterworth Press, Cambridge). . . . "Wolf of the Skies" will be included in LAURENCE LIEBERMAN's book *Flight from the Mother Stone,* which will be published by the University of Arkansas Press in spring 2000. . . . KERMIT MOYER is the author of *Tumbling,* a collection of stories published by the University of Illinois Press. He is a professor of creative writing at American University in Washington, D.C. . . . W.S. MERWIN's most recent book of poems is *The River of Sound* (Alfred A. Knopf). He won the 1998 Ruth Lilly Prize.

MARILYN NELSON's newest book, *The Fields of Praise: New and Selected Poems* (L.S.U. Press), was a finalist for the 1997 National Book Award, and won the 1998 Poets' Prize. She teaches at the University of Connecticut (Storrs). . . . TIMOTHY MURPHY's most recent book of poems is *The Deed of Gift* (Story Line Press). . . . PATRICIA HOOPER's *At the Corner of the Eye* was published in 1997 by Michigan State University Press. . . . DIANE THIEL's* chapbook, *Cleft in the Wall,* has just been published by Aralia Press. She received the Robinson Jeffers Award for Poetry. . . . SAMUEL HAZO is the Director of the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he is also McAnulty Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus at Duquesne University. His latest book of poetry is *The Holy Surprise of Right Now* (U. of Arkansas Press). . . . WILLIAM LOGAN's* most recent book of poems, *Vain Empires* (Penguin), and a book of early essays and reviews, *All the Rage* (Michigan), were both published in 1998. . . . DOROTHY SUTTON's* book of poems is *Startling Art: Darwin and Matisse,* Finishing Line Press, 1999. . . . JOHN LOUGHERY's most recent book, *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities, A Twentieth-Century History,* was the winner of the 1999 Randy Shilts Award for Gay Non-fiction. . . . BERT CARDULLO's collected film criticism from 1993 to 1998 is forthcoming from Edwin Mellen. He continues to teach in the Department of Theatre and Drama at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. . . . DEAN FLOWER teaches a course called Landscape, Literature and Ecology at Smith College. . . . THOMAS M. DISCH is recipient of the Michael Braude Award for light verse from the Academy of Arts and Letters. . . . R.S. GWYNN is the editor of *New Expansive Poetry: Theory, Criticism, History* from Story Line Press, and has recently published a chapbook of new poems, *If My Song.* He teaches at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. . . . TOM WILHELMUS is currently chair of the Indiana Humanities Council.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

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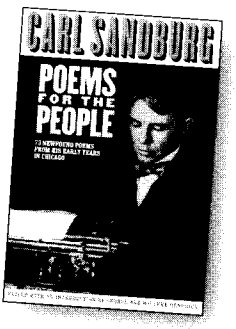


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IN THIS ISSUE:

Early and late [Berlin] offered no drum to march to, no flag to fly. Contradiction is the essence of the human condition. "Values may easily clash within the breast of an individual," he told an audience in Turin opera house in 1988, on accepting the Agnelli Prize, "and it does not follow that, if they do, some must be true and others false." The search for perfection, he went on, is a recipe for bloodshed. Mankind cannot at once be just and merciful, since mercy and justice often conflict. No society can practice liberty and equality, since no one forced to be equal is free. In short, utopia is conceptually as well as practically impossible.

—George Watson, "Isaiah Berlin: Magus of the North," p. 234.

Phyllis forgave me my unenlightened adolescence. It was before Animal Rights, before the Vietnam War, and before criticism of our gun culture came to the fore. She also found it easy to forgive my teenage love affair with guns because it was in the distant past. But news that we now had a handgun in our apartment would be as welcome as news that I had taken a mistress and was hoping she could move in with us. An acquaintance once told me what he did was his own business, and what his wife didn't know wouldn't hurt her. He was discreet, he said. I never bought that line of thinking, but I was in a tight spot. I'd hide the gun. Phyllis wouldn't know. I'd be discreet.

—Peter Makuck, "The Trouble with Smitty," p. 211.

We had of course by now realized that we had possibly done something very foolish. Seta ruled over his village as he might have done 800 years ago, and we were in fact in his power as long as we remained on the island. As far as we could discover, the only tourists who had been there before were a Swiss couple three years ago, who had had their own tent and camped some way away from the village. Nobody of course knew where we were, as we had not thought to tell anyone where we were going, and, since the island owned no seagoing boat, we were stuck there until one belonging to the neighboring island came back to fetch us—if it did. It would be possible for us to disappear without a trace.

—Diana Webster, "Cannibals and Kava," p. 182.

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